

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1963</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 6	"Man With A Mission"	Colossians 1: 25
January 27	"The Amazing Mercy Of God"	Colossians 2: 13-15
February 3	"Shadow And Substance"	Colossians 2: 17
February 3	"The Seven Virtues Of Saints And Sinners"	
February 10	"Of Saints And Sinners"	Romans 7: 20 Galatians 2: 29
February 17	"Courage"	Acts 28: 15
February 24	"Wisdom"	James 1: 5
March 3	"Justice"	Isaiah 9: 7
March 10	"Temperance"	Acts 24: 25
March 17	"Faith"	Hebrews 11: 6
March 24	"Hope"	I Peter 1: 3
March 31	"Love"	I John 4: 7-8
April 7	"The King Who Cried"	Luke 19: 41
April 14	"An Exclusive Company"	Acts 10: 40-41
April 28	"Verdicts Of Eternity"	Colossians 3: 1-4
May 5	"The Wrath Of God"	Colossians 3: 6
May 12	"The Christian Home"	Luke 2: 51
May 19	"As God's Chosen Ones"	Colossians 3: 12
May 26	"The Christian Ethic"	Colossians 3: 22
June 16	"God Is Love"	I John 4: 16

1963 continued	SERMON TITLE	TEXT
June 23	"The Christian And The Outsider"	Colossians 4: 5-6
June 30	"A Prisoner's Friends"	Colossians 4: 7
July 7	"Beyond Condemnation"	Luke 6: 37
August 18	"Duty To God - - And Man"	Judges 9: 7
August 25	"Recommitment And A Challenge"	I Corinthians 15: 1
September 1	"Our Father - - -"	Luke and Matthew
September 8	"Hallowed By Thy Name"	
September 15	"Thy Kingdom Come"	
MISSING September 22	"Thy Will Be Done"	
September 29 10	"Their Angels"	Matthew 18: 10
October 13	"Give Us Daily Bread"	
October 20	"Forgive Us - -"	
October 27	"The Protestant Tradition"	
MISSING November 3	"Lead Us Not Into Temptation"	
November 10	"Deliver Us From Evil"	
November 17	"The Power, The Kingdom. The Glory"	
November 24	"Amen"	
November 28	"The Necessity Which Is Gratitude" (Thanksgiving)	
December 1	"Jesus Is Coming: Already?" - The Christ Who Came -	
December 8	"Jesus Is Coming: Now?" - The Christ Who Comes -	
December 15	"Jesus Is Coming: Again? - The Christ Who Will Come -	

1963- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

December 22

"Jesus Is Coming - - Why?"

December 24

"Gifts For The King"

December 29

Remarks before Rev. Shaheen's Mission to India

"MAN WITH A MISSION"

The sermon today is based upon the Epistle lesson for the day. It bears the title, "Man With A Mission" and the text is a portion of the 25th verse of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians:

" - - to make the Word of God fully
known - -"

One of the amazing things about the Apostle Paul is this: that he was always trying to attempt the seemingly impossible - - and what is more amazing, often as not, he succeeded. Take today's text as an example. Paul says: it's my business in life, I've been especially commissioned, to tell people the whole story of God. That's one way you can translate these words: " - to make the Word of God fully known."

Now the more you think about these words, the more you might be inclined to say to yourself, that's impossible! To begin with, how can man, who is finite, fully understand what is infinite? How is it possible for a human being to be able to know absolutely everything that there is to be known about God, who is divine? The Apostle Paul must have been a mad man, and surely it's presumption of the highest degree for any man to say - - "I'm going to tell you everything about God - - and by the time I finish, there won't be a single unanswered question - - anything - - everything - that a man can know about God - - I'm here to tell you!"

You see, when we read Scripture so easily, so casually, so superficially, we may miss some of this implication, but this is precisely what you and I have a right to say when we read today's Epistle lesson, for Paul says, "I'm going to make the Word of God fully known - -".....and for the moment at least I say to you, it's impossible - impossible for man to know fully the mind of God.

But I'm not forgetting what I also said - - Paul had a way of attempting the seemingly impossible, and often as not he succeeded, for wherever he went, to any man that he saw, no matter where he saw him, he told him about God - - God in Jesus Christ.....and he said, I'm going to do this as long as I live with all the strength that God gives me.

Now is it possible for a man to do that? I must confess to you that it is. The word I used a while ago was the "seemingly" impossible. But whenever this type of thing occurs to a man, and it does every now and then, he is in a position to tell other people; for you see, Paul is no ordinary man! Paul was ^{the} a great antagonist - - the man who fought against Jesus Christ.....and then he had his conversion, and his life was completely turned around. And now wherever he went, instead of fighting against Jesus Christ, he said, I'm going to tell the whole story of Jesus Christ. Paul was able to do it because God had revealed it to him.

And our Christian religion hangs on the fact that God does reveal Himself to people. God has made Himself known....and incidentally, that's the whole story of what we have celebrated within the last two weeks - - for Christmas is the glorious revelation of God in Jesus Christ...

....God revealed Himself - -

...all that God is is in Christ!

...the more I think about the text, the more I wrestle with the words - - "to make the Word of God wholly known" - - I say to myself, well, there must have been a time, then, when the Word of God wasn't wholly known, if Paul says, "This is my responsibility, this is my obligation, to make it fully known." - - well, what did people know about God before Paul came along?

Well, they knew a great deal.

They had the Old Testament - - they had thousands of years of history....

They had patriarchs, they had prophets, they had priests,
they had kings....

They had the Ten Commandments....

....they had their glorious history.

They knew a great deal about God,

...as an example, they knew that God existed...

...and they knew that God was the Creator of the world

...and they knew that God was the Great Law-giver

...and they took unusual pride in believing that God

was their God - - the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob

and all the descendents of the patriarchs

...and they believed that God was a Father

This is quite a bit to know about God, and there are any number of people in our day who don't even know this much yet! But once the Apostle had seen Jesus Christ he began to understand that all he had known about God up to the point of Christ was only partial, incomplete, not enough.

Now, what was it that he found in Christ which made his knowledge of God perfect and complete? I think I know! He found in Christ the total adequacy of God's love. Up to the time of Christ people permitted themselves to believe that God loved them - - yes - - but it was the kind of love that was operative only so long as a man behaved. This is the implication, you see, of the Ten Commandments - - here they are - - it's a covenant - - it's an agreement -

...God says - "Here! You're My people! I'll give you
a set of rules and regulations, and what is more, if
you behave the way you ought to behave, I will bless
you....and if you don't behave the way I think you
ought to behave, you will be cursed."

Now, up to the time of Jesus Christ, this was man's understanding of God....

...a God who could smile, and a God who could frown....

...and because of their limited understanding, they thought there was a limitation to God's love. They couldn't quite appreciate the kind of love that could curse, and by that I mean punish, and rebuke. And furthermore, the limited understanding that they had of God's love was a God who was the Father only of them and of them alone....it was a God who said, "I will be your God, and you will be My people."....and there were just two groups involved--one group, rather, and God. Now up to the time of Jesus Christ, when man thought about God, they thought about a God who limited Himself only to them and to them alone. Such a knowledge of God is only partial - - it remains incomplete.

You're in for a jolt, my friend, if you ever sit down with a group of people who belong to religions other than the Christian faith. Suppose sometime you were in a conference with a Moslem?...a Buddhist?...a Hindu? - - each in his own way believes in God!and then as a Christian you say- -

"But there is no salvation outside of the faith
in Jesus Christ! As a Christian I maintain there
is no other name under Heaven whereby I must be
saved!"

....and those who belong to religious groups other than ours brand us as being highly exclusive - - that God should be ours and ours alone...

....up to the time of Jesus Christ, this is the way the Jew always talked and this is what he always believed - - this God was his God, was his, and only his.

Then came Jesus Christ.

And not until Jesus Christ came did men get the whole story.

Not until Jesus Christ came did men know - - see in action - - the extent to which God's love would go. The more I live, the more I'm convinced that perhaps

this is one of the greatest discoveries that any of us can ever make - - to discover how far anyone who loves us will go to prove his love. It wasn't until Jesus Christ came that man began to see the extent to which the love of God could go, and would go. It came all the way down from Heaven to begin with...all the way from Heaven to earth....

...and once here, it walked all the way - - all the way to the top of a lonely Hill - -

...men had never seen a love that went as far as that!

Every now and then we hint and we say - "Greater love hath no man than this--that a man goes so far as to lay down his life:"

...and for those who take this seriously, they say - - "and it's no ordinary man who is laying down his life for me - - - this is God!

It wasn't until Jesus Christ came that man got the full story of the extent to which God's love would go.

It wasn't until Jesus Christ came that men were able to understand how all-inclusive this love of God could be. It's meant, now, not only for the Jew, but for all the peoples on the face of the earth. That's one reason why in the calendar of the church we observe Epiphany Sunday - - the word Epiphany comes from the Greek "epiphaneto" (?) which means to manifest to all people that the love of God in Christ belongs to them as well. If the Apostle Paul were here with us, he'd have the time of his life, I think, trying to convince any number of us that God's love is that all-inclusive....

...it's not easy to believe that God loves those who are His enemies

...it's not easy for me to believe that God loves those who are my enemies

...from the Cross on Calvary's Hill the world remembers the unforgettable words
- - "Father, forgive them" - - - who?

- - - "My crucifiers--Your enemies! Forgive them!"

The world had never known a love that could include enemies, persecutors, crucifiers. Not until Christ came would men learn the whole story that God loves those who work against Him.

And beloved, your soul and your heart should be filled to overflowing at that thought, because that's where you and I happen to come into the picture. We are the enemies of Christ. We have not always loved Him as we should. We have not always obeyed Him as we should. We've found greater delight in doing the things that please us. But God goes on loving us....loving us....loving us.

And the third thing that has to be said - -

...it wasn't until Christ came that men understood why God loves us the way He does. If they had some kind of hint that God did feel kindly disposed toward us, they were never quite sure until Christ came; for the Scriptures put it:

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We have our moments of confrontation with different people - - it could be our immediate superior - - it could be our friend, our neighbor, a member of the family circle; and in our confrontation we discover that they have a particular interest in us, and then we probe and we try to find out the reason for their particular interest....

...what is the angle?- - why am I important to you?

...why do you care at all?

...it wasn't, I say to you, until Christ came that man began to understand the

purpose of God's love.

God loves us, not just because He wants to be loved in return -

...ah, that used to bother me a great deal when I was a youngster

dealing with the Ten Commandments--"for I your God am a jealous God"

When Jesus Christ came into the world men who took His love seriously at all began to understand that He loves us just because He can't keep from loving us, and He loves us because that's the only way we can be saved.

Men are not saved by their good works.

Men are not saved just because there's justice in the world.

Men are saved because somewhere in Heaven above there is a God whose love is great enough to save us from our sins.

Every now and then, in company with any number of you, I reflect upon the thought of death - - what will it be like? ...and then to meet Him who is the Judge of all mankind...

...as a child I used to think that God was in Heaven and He had a great book in front of Him; and that on one page He had my name and He kept the records--all the good and all the evil...

...I haven't rid myself completely of that notion.

But I know there's one thing now that I don't want at His hand: I don't want just justice! I don't want Him to balance the books to the extent that whatever good that I might do, perish the thought! would be enough to gain me entrance into Heaven. I have lived long enough to know that this is not possible.

When I come to the end of the journey's road, there is only one thing that I would ask of God - - mercy"Father, forgive - - "

...and the glorious assurance that comes to my soul since Christ came into the world is this - - that He will have mercy and He will abundantly pardon!

Ah, people had some idea that this might be true before Christ came, but

it was only once He was here and they saw the way He lived and He died with only one purpose in mind - - the salvation of your soul and mine.

Well, once Paul heard this and once Paul believed it he said - -

"This is everything! There's nothing more to be said! And with all the strength God gives me and wherever I go, I'm going to tell everyone I meet the whole story of God - - "

This is it, beloved - -

God's story of love....with you in mind.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE AMAZING MERCY OF GOD"

As you well know, the sermons for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church are being based upon passages of Scripture from Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Today's sermon bears the title, "The Amazing Mercy of God" and the text is a portion of the 13th and 15th verses of the second chapter of that Letter:

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses....
God made alive...having forgiven us all..having
canceled the bond which stood against us...this
He set aside, nailing it to the cross - - "

Not all people appreciate God for what He is and for what He does. This is the sad story of humanity. While it may be true that for the most part people know that God exists, but not all of them call properly and by rightful name everything that He desires to do for us and for what only God can do.

There are some people who respect God for the fact of creation....

they readily understand that there has been a force at work;
and this world of which we are a part is ours because the
Master-Mind, the Master-Architect, the Great Force of the
Universe made it possible. So there are people who think of
God - - Someone who designed it....Someone who started it
all.....He is the Creator

There are others, who when they think of God simply respect Him and recognize Him as the One who is inspired morality...

Ah, He was the One who gave to Moses the Ten Commandments.
This is the foundation, this is the arch, this is the key for
all the law which society in one way or another has seen fit
to adopt. So they recognize, so they respect God as the One

who has ordained moral order.

While this is all that God has done for some people, this is not all that God has done for all of us. The crowning glory of God lies in the fact that He is gracious, that He is merciful....and to this end Jesus Christ came into the world - - to prove once and for all that the God in Heaven above is not only a God of justice, a God of law, and a God of order, Creator of the universe - - - He is also a Heavenly Father who has a continuing interest in those whom He has created, and in the final analysis will do for them what needs to be done and what no one else can do--what even man himself cannot do for himself.

Every now and then there have been people who have been wrestling with this concept of God...."How can we make it plain to people that God is merciful and God is gracious? - - God is as God does - - "

"All right," says the Apostle Paul, "I have it for you! Listen, you Christians down there in Colossae. You have strange concepts of God. You've never fully come to appreciate Jesus Christ. Listen to me! I have something to tell you. Do you know what God has done for you? You've all been sinners. God forgave you! You were called dead in your sin. It was God who made you alive! You had a bond against you. It was Jesus Christ who canceled it! All the charges made against you - - Christ has taken these and nailed them to His Cross!"

....now, that's what the Apostle Paul is talking about in this section of his letter to the Colossians - - trying to give them a word picture - - trying to describe for them--trying to get over into their minds this wonderful thing

which God has done which every man needs, but not every man recognizes.

I'll tell you why I think we don't recognize it as often as we should - - we so seldom see ourselves the sinners that we are. By and large, we have a fairly good estimate of ourselves. Yes - - you and I - - we are the decent ones. We are the respectable people of the community. Be sure that you understand properly what I am about to say....

...it disturbs me at night occasionally when I try to sleep -
- - but I don't visit very many of our members who are in prison....

...we are the decent ones

...we are the respectable ones.

And because we see ourselves so favorably it's about all we can do to just thank God that He put us here, and made it so comfortable for us--so convenient in so many ways....we have enough to eat, and we have our friends, and we're getting along very nicely, thank you. What need have we for the mercy of God? We're so busy eating up His bounty - - we're so eager to take advantage of all that surrounds us that's so good, and we get along quite well....

.....but every now and then man has, if you please, a brush with death, and the meaning of life itself comes back to him, and in what might be this final moment on this earth, he's confronted by the fact of God, a God who has a way of holding him responsible, and a God who does keep the record.....and in that moment, what does a man have to offer God?

None of us can ever live long enough to stack up enough merit in our name to commend God to give us any kind of fair and decent treatment just because we deserve it. In fact, you know, that's how the church established this whole idea of Purgatory - - because some church fathers believed so seriously that one life is never long enough--there has to be always the added chance by which one makes

amends, or has, if you please, a little more time to get his soul in good order before he stands in the final judgment.

...says the Apostle Paul -

"Listen to me. In the final analysis, you're guilty because you are a sinner...and the only thing that you can really ask from God is the thing that you can't get for yourself anywhere else, and that is mercy. But you can never appreciate the meaning of mercy unless you see yourself the sinner that you are. Mercy is for the undeserving, not for the proud, not for the arrogant, not for those who are able - - "

...I should have brought it along to the pulpit - - it's over on my desk in the office...it just came yesterday...it's a kind of testimonial, a confessional, from one of our members, who having been hospitalized, undergoing surgery, now shares a reaction. The substance of the letter is this: it's only in the moment when life could be taken away that one might begin to realize that he has so little to offer God; and that if one had only one final thing to ask of God before his breath should be taken away, it would be - "Have mercy, Lord, have mercy!"

As long as God gives me memory I hope I can recall with profit the experience that I had with a parishioner. He had committed a sin against society, through mis-appropriation of funds. Before it was made known he shared it with me, and I walked with him as best I could as the Pastor, that lonely disgraceful road. I stood with him when he was told that charges would be pressed and that it seemed so very likely that he would be declared guilty, and a penalty would have to be exacted.....he and I had discussed the fact that no matter how long he might live, no matter how long his mate might live and another member of the family, the three of them, working a normal work-load for the balance of their

years, getting the average salary in Montgomery County, would not have been able in the balance of their lifetime, to carry so much as the interest load on the amount of money that had been mis-appropriated, let alone make payment, restitution, on the principal....

....and as over against that he simply said to the attorney, "Do you mean to tell me that there isn't anything - - there isn't anything that I can do?".....and the attorney said, "There's nothing. Nothing now. You must throw yourself only on the mercy of the court."

I tell you it's a parable - - it's every man's story

....not, perhaps, the mis-appropriation of funds,

but, perhaps, the mis-appropriation of life

...for God exacts, and God expects, and God requires, and God doesn't change His law for any single one of us, and who knows, in the moment of Judgment, you and I in the confrontation:

"Is there anything that I can do?"

"Nothing now--except depend upon My mercy."

Paul has this figure of speech, by the way. He talks about the bond which was against them, he talks about nailing it to the cross. Let me tell you exactly what that means - - it's from real life!

Had you lived in the day of the Apostle Paul and you wanted to get established in business and you had no funds of your own, and you couldn't go to the Small Business Administration, you couldn't go to a bank - - you would go to anyone who had money. And if he had faith in you and he felt the future was bright enough, he might establish you. And once you got the money from him he would require you to sign a parchment, and the parchment would read something like this:

"I, (whatever my name might be) have now received
from (and then this man who makes his funds avail-

able) the amount of (and then I would add the interest) this entire amount to be repaid (and then I would name the extension of time)" ...and if I could not write, then someone else would sign my name, with the understanding that whoever signed my name would not assume my financial responsibility...

...then after a period of years I would make payment; and when payment would be made fully I would appear to the man who had set me up; and then he would reach into his safe box, bring out his parchment, mark a cross over it, meaning, this is canceled now, and then he would tear the parchment in two and then he would walk with me to my place of business and he would nail over the entrance to my place of business the two sheets of parchment, with the cross clearly seen upon it - - nail it there for every man to see that I had fulfilled my obligation - - payment had been made.

...but if I were not able to make payment, I would be taken, sold as a slave - - that's how they did things in those days....and every single day that I could live, the remainder of my years, I would have to work and make the necessary restitution.

"Now," says the Apostle Paul, "Do you know, that's what Jesus Christ did for us. The time came for payment to be made for a life lived well, and you and I were unable to make the payment, so Jesus Christ steps in, and Jesus Christ says, 'I will take the paper, I will take the charge list, and I will nail it to my Cross - - I will assume your guilt!'

....this is the amazing mercy of God - - "I will forgive you your sin. You have nothing to pay. You cannot pay!"

William Russell Maltby has written these lines which describe this very thing. Listen carefully and see if you can get it - -

"When I was a child and had nothing to pay,
They fed me and clothed me, day upon day;
She nursed me in measles and other such ills,
Mended my clothing; he paid the bills;
They hoped for me, feared for me,
Prayed for me, too,
And saved me from evil and carried me through;
And I never knew how, and I never asked why
They should wear out their lives for a worm such as I.
Well, that was their way;
I was a child and had nothing to pay.

Those days are far gone. I grew to a man,
A respectable person, according to plan;
Took sixteen in collars and wore a black coat,
Political candidates called for my vote;
I wrote to the papers and gave them my views,
And preached to the people all patient in pews;
I was paid once a month, and I had an account
At the bank, with the checkbook to show the amount.
Was it worth all God's trouble?
So much of my life is wood, hay, stubble
So little is good that could meet His desire,
So much of me bad and fit for the fire,
If God calls for a reckoning, Ah, what shall I say?
"Lord, this poor sinner has nothing to pay!"
"Nothing to pay - give him justice -
Nothing for nothing - take him away!"
But God said, "Stay. Christ is for those
who have nothing to pay."
Well, that's God's way - -
Christ is for those who have nothing to pay."

But the only people who really know it are the deeply contrite - - -
those who are truly sorry for their sins and who know what it is to say

"Lord, have mercy"

...and He will not disappoint them.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

We know Thou art good, O God,

That Thou art great;

And because of Jesus Christ we know how gracious

Thou art.

Continue to exact from us and to require

a life that is lived well, that each of us may

use fully the talents which Thou hast given.

And yet, when we have done our best, permit us to

know that, unprofitable sinners as we may be, Thou

wilt forgive us, and therefore keep before us the

hope of Heaven.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven,

"SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE"

The sermon bears the title, "Shadow and Substance" and the text, again from Colossians, today the second chapter, the 17th verse:

"These things are a shadow, but the substance
is Jesus Christ - "

J. B. Phillips puts it very boldly and bluntly when he said:

"These things are but symbols, but the solid
fact is Jesus Christ"

The Apostle Paul was doing the only reasonable thing that could be done, once he had heard that an inferior brand of Christianity was imperiling the faithful Christians who lived in that Asia Minor town of Colossae. He sat down and he wrote a letter; and he wrote a letter to those whom he trusted, to those whose judgment he could respect.

Then he did two things.

In that letter he says - - "Keep in mind that what they're trying to do is to unsettle you by calling more attention to the things that surround Jesus Christ than to Jesus Christ himself."

And the other thing that he did in this letter is to remind them as earnestly as he could that the cardinal principle of the Christian religion is Jesus Christ, and anything that becomes more important than Jesus Christ can be a very damaging thing.

Let's look at the last of these first.

The Apostle Paul says Christians ought to remember that in Jesus Christ they have everything that they need. In fact, the Apostle Paul put it this way - - "In Him all the fulness of God is - " - - anything and everything that you and I need in Jesus Christ is there--readily made available.

This is the solid fact of the Christian religion. Now anything that gets prior attention minimizes this fact.

You know what was happening in Colossae?

This inferior brand of the Christian religion was talking about....

...well, to be a Christian you ought to give due and proper emphasis to what you eat, and you can't properly be regarded a Christian unless you keep faithfully a certain diet; and you observe this diet on certain days....

...and then, to be a Christian, you ought also to remember that there are many ways to God - - why, Jesus Christ is only one way. There are many ways by which to find God....think about these different ways - - don't give all your attention to Jesus Christ....

The Apostle Paul was infuriated, irritated and annoyed. For anything that gets more attention than Jesus Christ minimizes the fact of Christ. Now, says the Apostle Paul, these things may be all right - - but they're only symbols. These things may be all right - - but they're only shadows. The basic element, the solid fact is Jesus Christ himself.

Now, every now and then in the history of the Christian church we have to sit down and take stock of ourselves - - to make certain that we might not be giving more attention to the things that surround Christ than to Christ himself. It would be a grand thing, I presume, if once something exceedingly wonderful had come to us, we would never have to worry, but this is not true to the facts of life. We have to sit down and carefully re-evaluate what we have, lest we lose it.

Anniversaries, you see, become a necessary function in life. For it's only on an anniversary, perhaps, that some of us sit down and do any solid thinking at all concerning the fact that's recognized in the anniversary itself. Every time a man celebrates his birthday anniversary it ought to be a calling to attention to his own soul of the gift of life itself, of the parents who nurtured him and brought him up, of one's responsibility to Him who alone gives life.....a wedding anniversary--if they were to serve no other purpose than this, it might be the recollection of that day when two people knelt before an altar - - what they promised to each other they also promised to God. If an anniversary served no other purpose than this: to remember the vows that were made - - it serves its useful purpose.

It's a salutary thing for a man to remember what he promised Jesus Christ when he was confirmed in the Christian faith. We don't make enough of the anniversary of our confirmation. It would be a good thing if we did.

This marks the seventh anniversary of my relationship with you as Pastor. How it may strike you I cannot tell, but each single anniversary that I observe with you becomes a re-commitment to the promise that I made when on this first Sunday in February seven years ago at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon I was installed as your Pastor.

Likewise, every now and then in our relationship with anything, a man ought to take a good long look, lest he emphasize things other than the basic and the essential. It is not easy for me to tell you that a man could lose Jesus Christ - - not that Jesus Christ will lose him! This is the purpose of the letter that Paul wrote, now, among other purposes.

First of all, says the Apostle Paul, look at what you have in Jesus Christ. You have everything!.....the Lord and Giver of Life...the Redeemer...the One who

opens the Gate of Heaven. Don't ever allow anything else to become more central than this!

....and he therefore was annoyed and irritated when he discovered that there were Christians who were talking more about their religious observances than they were the fact of Christ!they were talking more about other people, other agents by which one might get to know God, than the pure, unadulterated fact of Christ himself.

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that this kernel of truth so relevant to the day of the Apostle Paul could also be considered by us equally relevant in our day and to this congregation? You have a right to know that every sermon that's prepared by your Pastor is prepared earnestly, with the thought in mind that once the sermon should be preached, that no matter what else you may think of it or say of it, you ought always to be able to feel that in the preaching of that sermon Jesus Christ was being made known to you....that the sermon itself is a way by which Jesus Christ comes to you again and again.

There is a pastor of a Lutheran church in America who has had the good fortune to serve two different parishes over a period of fourteen years; and in each of the parishes that he served he had the opportunity to master-mind the building of a magnificent temple of worship. I sing his praise for this reason - - that whatever else he did, he saw fit that no one would ever go to the pulpit, in the churches in which he was part, lest the preacher's eye would first fall upon a plaque upon which are inscribed the words of Scripture: "Sir, we would see Jesus."that's the way it ought to be with any sermon - - not what you believe the preacher thinks about Jesus - - not that the sermon itself should be an airing of his opinions of Christ....but once the sermon is preached, with clarity and conviction there should be no doubt in your mind that Jesus Christ is pre-eminentthat in Jesus Christ all the fullness of God dwells.

can to the substance which causes the shadow....that's why we maintain the principle in Saint Luke Church that whenever a person becomes a member of this congregation, it's clearly stated that he becomes a member of this congregation because of his loyalty to Jesus Christ, and whatever happens in this congregation is simply the symbolic value of the substance of the relationship personally and directly to Jesus.

I beg you, my friend....don't ever put more stock in the shadow than in the substance. The only thing that's eternally worthwhile is your own personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and from it all other things have their rightful meaning.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

No experience in the life of another preacher, I think, has been as heart-warming to me, and as encouraging, as the recollection of what John Wesley did when, as a traveling evangelist, he went from place to place in the century of which he was part, and he could record in his diary day after day after he had preached - -

"I gave them Christ....

I gave them Christ.....

I gave them Christ...."

No sermon has a right to be preached unless in it and through it you get the confrontation of Jesus Christ. I take not only myself to task - - I equally charge every Sunday School teacher in Saint Luke Church, that once the Sunday School class is over, and the pupil goes his way...whatever he may remember, he may remember that he had a Sunday School teacher who talked to him, in one way or another, about Jesus Christ, and that he can't possibly recall the Sunday School teacher without thinking of Jesus Christ.

I frankly admit to you that a few weeks ago I was somewhat irritated and annoyed when after Vespers I attended a group meeting being conducted by some of our young people. When I went away from the meeting I was pleased that they were as excited and as interested as they were in their discussion....but the upshot of the whole matter was this: that all that they were doing was sharing their own views, their own opinions - - that nowhere in that meeting was there the clear, crystal declaration of what Jesus Christ thinks about this matter.

My final word to you this morning is this - -

It's an easy thing for a congregation sometimes to confuse itself with Jesus Christ. It's not always a credit when people of a certain congregation talk more about their congregation than they do of Jesus Christ. Even congregational loyalty can be a shadow to which people can give more attention than they

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "OF SAINTS AND SINNERS"
(Introductory Sermon)

Last year during Lent the series of sermons preached at that time was based upon the general theme "The Deadly Sins." This year as we are about to enter the Lenten season, the series will be based upon the general theme, "The Christian Virtues." Today's sermon is the introductory one in the series and it bears the title "Of Saints And Sinners"; and the text a double one, first Romans, the 7th chapter, the 20th verse:

"Now if I do what I would not, it is no more
I who do it, but sin that dwells in me - - "

...and the other text, from Galatians, the 2nd chapter, the 29th verse:

"Not I, but Christ who lives in me - - "

Make up your mind, Paul - - which one is it? It sounds so much like double talk. In one verse you tell us that whatever you do that you shouldn't do, you do because you are sin-possessed.....in the other verse of Scripture you say that whatever good you do, you do it because you are Christ-possessed. Make up your mind, Paul - - which is right?

Each of us honestly believes, of course, that you can never take what a man says at one time and walk away at that point and believe that this might be the whole story. Some of us have lived long enough with people that we always have to balance and counter-balance what they say once by what they have already said or by what they might say again. And when this occurs, we may discover inconsistency, and this inconsistency in itself could become the indicator of a man's real character. If there is inconsistency, how do you account for it, and what does this inconsistency in itself mean?

Paul, are you a split personality?

Paul, are you two people - - is there a divided self?

Surely these verses of Scripture are opposite to each other. Once he says all the good that he's going to do, he's able to do because Christ is in his heart....he also says all the evil that he does, he does, whether he wants to do it or whether he doesn't want to do it, he does it, and the reason he does it is because he is sin-possessed. And the real story is that you and I could say much the same thing.

I'm going on the assumption, of course, that you have met Jesus Christ; and having been confronted by Christ, you see yourself the sinner that you are. And yet, you do have your better moments, when, in these better moments, you try to do with all your heart what is right.....well, you have feet of clay, but occasionally there's a halo - - it might be tilted, but nonetheless, a halo can be discerned.

Now because this true for each of us, maybe we have sympathy for the man who wrote in a very, very plain way - -

"Within my earthly temple
there's a crowd;
There's one of us that's humble,
one that's proud,
There's one that's brokenhearted
for his sins,
There's one that unrepentant sits
and grins;
There's one that loves his neighbor
as himself;
And one who cares for naught but
fame and self.
From much corroding care I should
be free
If I could once determine which
is me."

Well, that's your story, isn't it?

At least, I'm willing to make this pulpit a confessional booth for the moment - -

and tell you that's my story. The Apostle Paul, in much of his writing, lays bare his soul. There were moments in his life when he knew that he was devil-possessed....there were moments in his life when he knew that he was Christ-possessed. Now this I must say: he was right--both times! For the descriptive that belongs to you and to me is the descriptive that we are both sinner and saint!

....you may have met Jesus Christ

....and you may call Him your Saviour

....and you may know that you are walking in the ranks of those
who are being redeemed

...but the brutal, frank fact remains that you and I are sinners to the very day that we die. We are in the process of being sanctified, but we are still sinners.

We Lutherans cling to this quite tenaciously. There are other groups who call themselves religious who even laugh at us. There are people who, if they had their way, would ask us to re-write our liturgy. They say it's not a very complimentary thing that you do to your people when as soon as you get them together in church and you begin the formal Order for Worship, you confront them with the fact that they are sinners - - in fact you even put those words into their mouths--they have no choice. If they're going to worship in your church and participate, they have to use these words - -

"We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are

by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have

sinned against Thee by thought, word and deed - - "

.....there are those who laugh at us and ridicule us, and they say - - "You do man an injustice - - you talk about the depravity of human nature - - you give

man a guilty conscience! What man needs is a gentle, gracious push, a kind pat on the back.....you're not really as bad as people say you are. Why, we'll just give you an ideal environment, and day by day in every way you're going to get better and better and better. Just think that way - - think positively.....don't you let that Lutheran preacher shake his finger in your face and say 'Sinner! - - Sinner!'- - - "

Well, we're not going to change the liturgy.

Next Sunday when you come to church we'll begin just as we began this morning, because we have to be true to the facts of life. No matter how earnest your resolve may be today, and no matter how sanctimonious you may feel right now, within the next twenty-four hours you may take yourself to task in the sight of God for having thought the thing that you know you should not have thought, for having said the thing that you know does not become the mind of Christ, and for having even done the things for which you will rightfully feel guilty. And that's why next Sunday when you come, we'll begin at the same point at which we began today - -

"We poor sinners confess unto Thee - - "

...and even though in this atmosphere of worship and even though while we are surrounded by fellow-believers - - even though we are walking, now, in the company of the redeemed.....yet tonight, I, for one, when I go to bed, will have to have as a part of my prayer the very same thing that was a part of my prayer this morning in my waking moments - - "Lord, have mercy.....Lord, forgive."

Do I have to tell you, by the way - - do I have to tell you that the words sinner and saint belong primarily in the vocabulary of the religious? People who are not religious do not talk about their sins. People who are not religious do not talk about the process of sanctification or redemption. That word sin comes

into our vocabulary only as we are confronted by the fact of Jesus Christ. When I am confronted by the fact of Christ I see myself the miserable soul that I am.

Some of you remember how Oscar Blackwelder used to go around and preach, and invariably would use as his chief illustration his impression of the Supreme Court Building, just around the corner from the Church of the Reformation. On a day such as this, he used to tell his audiences, his congregations, his groups of people to whom he would be preaching or speaking, that the Supreme Court Building might glisten, gleaming white....and then when he walked around when snow had newly fallen, the Supreme Court Building seemed gray and shabby and dirty--in contrast to what might be referred to as the immaculate snow, clean from heaven.....

...well, that's what happens when you and I are confronted by the fact of Jesus Christ....that's what happens when we are in the presence of God--He who is clean and pure and perfect.....we see ourselves the sinners that we are.

It's a salutary thing for a man to be called a sinner. It's a salutary thing, I say, to be called a sinner, for saviourhood has no meaning whatever unless a man sees himself as a sinner. If you're to have a saviour, you have to be saved from something. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to save us from our sins. It's a salutary thing to know myself sinner that I am.

Now, it shouldn't be difficult for people to see themselves in this relationship. Some of us have found ourselves in this relationship with other people. I remember in my first parish meeting a woman some 60-70 years of age, whose very character breathed poise. She had only to walk into the room and you felt here was every inch a lady, and you stood up in the presence of some-

thing clean and good.....and all the time that you respected her for that, you felt ashamed of yourself, lest when you might reach her years your character would not be as clean and as pure as we knew hers to be.

This is what happens, sometimes, in dramatic productions, when we are confronted in the same moment by both the hero and the villain--by the good and the bad. The contrast is clearly seen. Now if you and I can be made aware of this on a human level, how much more so, then, would it be easy for us to understand the relationship between God and you and me, and the sinner comes into clear focus? There are people who do themselves an injustice when they fail to recognize the fact that they are sinners.

But on the other hand, they do themselves an injustice if they permit themselves to think that that's all that they are. For the other side of the coin is this --

we who are sinners are being redeemed...

we are caught up in the process of sanctification....

Jesus Christ is dwelling in our hearts.....

...and because Jesus Christ has to work within the limitations of our sinful nature, because Jesus Christ has to work within the limitations of our human nature, we are never fully made perfect in this world....and we remain a sinner to the day we die.....

but

...from the moment we have been confronted by Jesus Christ and we know His redeeming grace, our attitude toward sin begins to change, and we begin to hate the sin that we have committed, and we despise even the very inclination that possesses us to do evil today or tomorrow. This is part of the process of sanctification--this is part of the element of the saint

that's in the sinner because now he hates his sin--now if only he could have done with it he would, with all his heart and with all his soul.

And the second aspect of it is this: that he begins to realize, once Jesus Christ has come into his life and the process of sanctification has begun to take effect, he knows that he can never have done with it by himself. That's why, once the Apostle Paul had been confronted by Jesus Christ, he was perfectly willing to give full credit to Jesus Christ for whatever good he was able to do; for he said - - "Even the good that I am now able to do, I do only because of Jesus Christ."

I would not take away from any man the sad fact that he is a sinner.

But on the other hand, I would count my witness for Jesus Christ unworthy and incomplete if I could not say, with ardor and with conviction, that you have the possibility of sainthood. Fall you may, but once the redeeming love of Jesus Christ becomes operative in your life, you are able to arise from your fall and face in the right direction. This is what it means to have the process of sanctification at work.

If I were to take, as I have told some of you, my parents to task for anything that I could say that they failed to do for me, I would have to admit, speaking now with complete objectivity, I would hold them responsible for never having told me that as long as I live I would have to do battle against the Devilfor when that terrible moment of temptation came, and by the grace of God, one could withhold, there was the wishful desire that this might never return again... ..but it will....it will. And some of you, perhaps, know it better than I.

...and I keep recalling, for whatever profit it may bring to my soul, the dramatic production that I saw called "The Shadow of the Devil"....the woman who had been converted, but the terrible pull of the base remained....until the very

day that she died, she had to fight the battle all over again....and even to the very Gate of Paradise she was pursued by the influence of the Evil One.

Day by day we fight the battle of sin all over again.

But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, having been redeemed by Him, I never fight the battle alone - - and He is able to sustain me and to strengthen me and to awaken within me the noble desire that when I breathe my last, thanks be to Him, I might have a little bit more on the profit side of the ledger than on the debit side of life.

If I did not believe this, I would not have come to this
sacred desk this morning.....

If I did not believe this, I would turn my back upon it now,
never again to come back to preach:

the saving grace of Jesus Christ, which, while
we are still sinners, keeps before us the hope
of Heaven!

Beloved, this should give to you the courage that you need most - - to persevere with patience the course which is yours yet to run.

In the sight of God, you were not meant to go to Hell.....

...but only by His redeeming grace will you be kept from it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "COURAGE"

The series of sermons this year in Saint Luke Church to be preached between now and Palm Sunday will be based upon the general theme of "The Seven Virtues." It was last year at this particular time that we considered "The Seven Deadly Sins." I warn you at the very beginning, they may not have the same attraction as the series last year, for in the mind of many people, vice always seems to have more attractive features than virtue. It ought not to be so among us.

Today's sermon deals with the Christian virtue of "Courage"; and the text is the 15th verse of the 28th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage."

There's far more in this text than what meets the eye at first glance, and with whatever sanctified imagination you may have, try to picture the Apostle Paul on his way to the Eternal City called Rome. Surely from the days of his impressionable youth, he had longed for, he had hoped for the day when he might enter Rome; and idealistic man that he was, he probably thought that some day - - this was before he came to know Jesus Christ....

- - that some day he might appear in the Eternal City as
the gallant leader of a mighty host of soldiers,
fresh from the conflict, to come back and to receive
the plaudits of a grateful capital city...
- - or he might have thought of himself, interested as he
was in the political, social, economic order of the
world - (this, too, was before he came to know Jesus
Christ as his Saviour)...that he might appear in Rome,

at the invitation of the senators, and how they might set aside a special day in his behalf, and how he would go to the Forum...and how he would hold the people in the hollow of his hand as he captivated the audience with his eloquence....

Paul had the makings of all of this. And one can probably understand that this might have been his dream. And he might have thought to himself: "See Rome and die"....for what was there to be seen this side of the Eternal Gate after you had gone to Rome? for Rome had everything.

Now he's on his way to Rome.

But he's not the leader of a mighty host of soldiers.

And he's not the celebrated speaker who has come, now, to deliver a great oration.

He's headed for Rome - that's right!

...but he's in chains! ...he's a prisoner!

...and as we know from the record, what eventually will happen--he'll be put to death! and the thing that lies in front of him is death

...no plaudits...no great acclaim...no gallant soldier

Human being as he was, he might have known depression of mind and spirit.

He might have looked upon himself as the frustrated one, the disappointed, the disillusioned, the discouraged. And even though as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ - - remember that Epistle lesson for today?---how so often he was left for dead?....is this what it is to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ? What discouragement must have come to him.

But standing out as a solitary light in the distance in a dark night is this 15th verse of the 28th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage."

Now, a spring in his step.

Now, a light in his eye.

Now, a new, a stout heart.

Now, a man fearless, for there had come to meet him, and I would like to think as they came near him, they came singing the hymns of the faith...and their leader in their group, perhaps, as he came to the Apostle Paul, embraced him and gave him a holy kiss.....and maybe as a group they fell at his feet and they had a prayer meeting--a prayer meeting in which they gave thanks to God for the witness of the Apostle Paul....and that the Apostle Paul, even though he be in chains, was coming to their city.

When he saw all of this, he gave thanks to God, and took courage.

Took courage, now, because he saw that God was already at work in them and through thembecause, you see, you and I lose heart when we think of the Kingdom of God depends only upon our witness and when we know disappointment and we become disillusioned we allow ourselves to think that everything, now, is going to fold up. Maybe that's the way the Apostle Paul felt for the moment, but when he saw these people coming to him, immediately he recognized the fact that God also was at work in and through them....and for this he took heart and had courage.

It's interesting, isn't it, this expression is always "take" courage. Take courage? No man can engender the noble spirit within himself. Courage is something we know as we get it from somebody else. But for the moment, now, let me remind you that there are different kinds of courage.

There's the kind of courage that's concerned only with the preservation of one's life -- the desire to live...like the cornered rat that fights back.

It's not to be dealt with lightly. In the final analysis, what a man may need most is the amount of courage that he's able to muster at any one critical moment. There may be people in this Nave right now who are here because it was at death's door they refused to die. And they are here because they had the sheer will to live and to garner whatever physical resources remained in a body that was being deteriorated; and by the grace of God they said, "We will gather together what resources remain."

You know, of course you do, that you have been in certain sick-rooms where you had prayed, and where medical science has done its best, and where even the good man of God may say, "If only she had a will to live--if only her spirit would cooperate with ours"....and then it happened! And everything was hanging there in the balance for the moment, depending upon how much courage one soul could muster.

This is a parable of life.

There are many different kinds of courage.

There is physical courage, where in the face of death a man will give himself recklessly and with complete abandon to rescue someone from a burning building....
...to rescue someone from the water's depth - - sacrifice his own life because he's able to do it courageously.

We know what we mean by this kind of courage.

There's also the kind of courage that a man has when in the face of great opposition--his job, his family, his neighbors--refuses to bow, and will gather whatever strength he can, moral and spiritual, to stand firmly in the face of any kind of opposition. You know what's meant by this kind of courage.

But incidentally, I'd like to talk to you very briefly about another kind of courage....the kind of a courage that most of us need sometimes that is called the courage to face yourself - -

- - not the enemy from without

- - not the economic, political or social issue that's
a threat to your community

...the courage that many of us lack is to face up to the fact that we happen to be the kind of person that we are. And there are people who go from pastor to pastor, from counselor to counselor, from psychiatrist to psychiatrist, for only one reason - - hoping that somewhere, somehow, in a visit or a conference, they might not have to face the fact that they happen to be exactly what they are. It takes courage for a person to face up to the fact that he is inferior. And it takes courage for a man to admit that he is inadequate. It takes courage for a person to recognize the truth that others do have what he doesn't have.

And there comes a time in a man's life when it takes courage to recognize the fact that he's a sinner--that he can't stand in the presence of God - - that he can't treat God as an equal.....it takes courage to fall upon one's knees and to accept himself as he is.

It takes courage to accept other people as they are. And how often you and I commit the gross error in this respect. The shadow-boxing that we engage in - - thinking that other people are what we think they are--what we want to think they are.....and how much damage has been done to our children when we just can't possibly have done with the image that we project and fail to accept that they are not what we think they are.

It takes courage.

And it takes courage to accept yourself as you are.

It also takes a measure of courage to accept yourself as the person you could become.

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "WISDOM"

The sermons these weeks are being based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues" and the virtue to be discussed at this time is the Christian virtue of "Wisdom"; and the text is the 5th verse of the 1st chapter of the General Epistle of James:

"If any man among you lacks wisdom, let him
ask of God, who gives all things generously."

James, did you have a smile on your face when you wrote those words? Surely, you're not being facetious, are you? You have written - - "If any man among you lacks wisdom - - "any man among us lack wisdom? this is our need, isn't it? We are the ones who freely, frankly confess to our friends that we have done the stupid and we have done the foolish things. While there may be many a man who may never fall upon his knees and say, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" - - he may admit to his friends that he has done many a foolish thing--downright stupid, certainly unwise. This could be the prayer of every man: "Forgive me my stupidity" - - until I arrive at the day when I can say: "My stupidity, O God, was gross sinfulness in your sight." If every man will not be honest enough to say, "I am a sinner"...he may at least say to him, "I have been stupid, I have been foolish, I have been unwise."

Therefore, James, if you don't mind, let me alter your translation for a moment. I will not say, "If any man among you seems to lack wisdom - - "I will say, "Let everyone among you lacking wisdom ask God, who gives generously all things to him who asks."

We who are acquainted with the Pennsylvania Dutch country immediately recall the saying, you see, carved into wood, or it's on a placque, or the motto which you read on your place-mat in the restaurant....."Why are we so long so

dumb, so short so smart?" This is the admission that each of us makes--always the decisions to be made--always.

And we make them wisely or foolishly. Perhaps we will not find ourselves as the young man upon the throne did. And by the way, there's many a fascinating page in the Old Testament - - one that has always held a fascination for me, in the Book of the Chronicles and the Book of the Kings...when a young man has come to a throne...and he's made aware of the responsibility that rests upon his shoulders. And then God appears to him.

...In this moment of his inaugural - -

"Solomon, ask of Me what you want and I will give it!"

...imagine a moment like that before God--God who is all wisdom--saying to any one of us -

"Name it - - It can be yours for the asking!"

...it's significant to note the things for which Solomon does not ask--the temptation that could come to any one of us....

Solomon does not ask for wealth.....

Solomon does not ask for honor.....

Solomon does not ask for prestige....

Solomon does not ask to be able to conquer his enemies--to have done with the opposition....

...Solomon says:

"God, give me wisdom, that I might be able to discern right from wrong - - that I might judge these people, whom Thou hast given to me, righteously."

And then there must have been the kindest, the most satisfying look upon the face of God, and God says,

"Solomon, you've asked aright! And since you have

not asked for riches, honor, and the life of your enemies--you've asked for wisdom, that you might decide between right and wrong and judge My people righteously, wisdom shall be given unto you...and as good measure, a number of other things added as well!"

We may not find ourselves upon a throne.

We may not find ourselves in the position that Solomon found himself.

But each of us is always finding himself where decisions have to be made.

...in my own personal life: the kind of a person I ought to become - -

"Give me wisdom, O God, that I might decide
right from wrong - -"

...the work that shall claim me: for one of the tragedies in life is
to give yourself for something to which you are ill fitted,
and where you can't possibly do the best possible good - -
- the decision that must be made

...the decisions that have to be made within the family circle--the
father and the mother who with true sensitivity rack their
brains night and day, trying to find out the right way to
deal graciously, patiently...sagaciously...with the young
adult, the adolescent, who is beginning to mature--trying
to find himself

...and I, as a parent, recognize the tremendous
responsibility upon me to speak, or not to speak..
...to draw near, or to withdraw...

Each of us finds himself in this kind of situation - - where the thing most
needful is to be able to do the wise thing.

Now, how does one get wisdom?

We do well to recognize it as a Christian virtue. Christians were never meant to be foolish people; and you never allow piety, no matter how wonderful it is, to substitute for wisdom.

How does one become wise?

Would I surprise you if I were to tell you that it's something that comes to you--it's a gift. You don't begin with it. You receive it. And no matter where you read between the pages of this Good Book from cover to cover - - wisdom is something that comes to a man as an answer to prayer....

"Ask, Solomon, what you want".....

...Solomon prayed for wisdom.

And the other extreme in the New Testament - - James, recognizing the necessity for wisdom, says,

"He who lacks it, let him ask God for it".....

And this is one of the things that we all too seldom put upon our prayer list...

"God, give me wisdom."

How foolish we are!

..."God, make me well"

..."God, let fortune smile on me"

..."God, make people treat me more graciously"

...even when we storm Heaven's gates, we want God to control the events of our lives, when God's specialty may not be an event, but an experience.

An experience is what we do with the thing that happens to us--what we make of it...and how we apply the mind of God to it..

..and this is wisdom:

the application of the mind of God, through me, to my situation.

Wisdom is not the accumulation of factual knowledge.

Arnold Toynbee is perfectly right when he says that our hope in this age does not lie primarily in our technicians and in our scientists, for they could lack morality and they could lack wisdom. There's the man who went asking advice and counsel--was it a psychiatrist? a psychologist? an analyst? a pastor--it doesn't make any difference....but he went to this man with his own problemand the man said, "I have just the book to help you. Here is an accumulation of certain facts dealing with your particular problem. Why don't you read it?" And the man dropped his head and said, "Alas, I fear this book will not help me, because, you see, I helped write that book!" It is never knowledge in itself, but the application of what is the mind of God to your situation through you.... this is wisdom. This is the Christian understanding of wisdom.

And how do you get it?

You ask God for it. You pray for it.

And then, sometimes, God gives it to you directly. There is the moment of revelation--illumination. It will come to you.

Every sermon, to an extent, is autobiographical. You have a right to know this....seven years ago....

"Shall I, or shall I not, become the Pastor of

Saint Luke congregation in Silver Spring?"

...for there are some of us pastors who believe that God not only calls us into the ministry, but God also calls us to certain places at certain stages in our ministry....so I prayed. And I freely admit in your presence that there came the moment of illumination--there was no doubt--it was made crystal clear, if not to you, at least to me. And that's the only authority by which I stand before you now. God can do that sometimes - - God will do it sometimes - - give you wisdom in the moment of revelation, and it becomes crystal clear.

In one of the great controversies of the history of the church, a issue had to be decided....it was the man who was going to be given the opportunity to speak...it was his address that chartered the course for his church from that moment on; and when he had finished speaking, they milled around his desk to look at the notebook that he had in front of him, to see what notes he had kept that enabled him to speak to eloquently.....and all that they saw on the page of the notebook--the Latin:

"Das lucem, Domine" "Das lucem, Domine"

... "Give light, O God, give light--illumine me,

reveal Thy way to me now!"

...and so it happened.

God can give you wisdom when with all your heart you pray for it, that the mind of God shall be made applicable in your situation, through you.

And then sometimes God answers your prayer for wisdom through other people. Fortunate indeed is any one man who has a person to whom he can go whom he trusts implicitly, whose judgment he respects....and then to get counsel and advice, for God will speak to you out of the accumulation of their experience. Now, this usually is an older person, not necessarily so. But one of the grand things that comes through age is the accumulation of experience and the ability to read that experience with true perception. This is one of the grand and useful purposes served by grandparents, out of the fulness of their years, to be able to speak wisely to those of us who are considerably younger.

A missionary came back from India, and somebody said, "What does India need most?" And immediately a very surprising answer. Remembering how many people die young, and how few old people there really are to give counsel and advice, he said, "What India needs most - - grandparents!" ...who out of their years can

Speak wisely to your need and to mine.

The amazing thing about you and me is this:

- - that God has so smiled upon us that He has made it possible for us to be able to get His insight and to allow His wisdom to become applicable to us.....and until we know this, we shall remain in our folly....

....and perhaps there is no greater sin, aside from the sin of pride, than the sin of stupidity, for a man doesn't have to be foolish when the wisdom of God is available.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "JUSTICE"

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues." The virtue to be considered today is the virtue called "Justice." The text, interestingly enough, is from the Old Testament, the prophecy of Isaiah, the 9th chapter, the 7th verse:

" - to establish it and to uphold it with
justice - - "

I tell you, it's a shameful thing that we Christians have done to God. We haven't permitted ourselves always to see Him exactly as He is. We paint His picture, all too frequently, only as we think He ought to be--if you please, only as we hold Him to be. Somewhere along the line, and properly so, of course, we were introduced to the tremendous thought that He is a God of love, a God of everlasting compassion, who will deal graciously with us and will always have mercy. So He is. But this can never be fully appreciated unless He is also seen as a God of justice. He not only is our Heavenly Father, but He is our holy, righteous Heavenly Father....and that word righteous has to be kept in there.

In fact, Isaiah, the ancient seer, when he was telling people about the Kingdom of God that was to be established through Jesus Christ, kept reminding them that one day this Kingdom would be established, and it would be established by Jesus Christ, and when it would be established by Jesus Christ, it would be upheld with justice. It was the one thing they never permitted themselves to forget.

Maybe this has been characteristic of the Jewish people one generation after another - - they have kept themselves alive on the holy thought that this God whom they love and this God whom they serve is a God of justice, a God who is ever mindful of a minority--a God who will not permit them to receive evil

forever at the hands of other people. This is the one thing, perhaps, that has kept them alive, as a nation, believing that some day that God would see that they got their just due, no matter how they might be driven and made the scape-goat of one land after another. Whether you care to accept it or not, in a certain sense, this virtue called justice is more meaningful in the pages of the Old Testament than in the pages of the New.

And the fault is ours, because we talk always about a God of love and compassion and permit ourselves deliberately to ignore or to evade the fact that He is also a God of justice. For shame upon us--for shame! Says the prophet Isaiah, "He will establish His Kingdom and He will uphold it with justice."....therefore we do God a disservice when we ever permit ourselves to think of Him as anything other than a God of justice.

Let me tell you what happens when we forget that He is a God of justice. In the first place, we forget about this thing called responsibility...for if justice does anything, justice fixes responsibility. And justice has a way of pointing its finger at certain people and saying--"But you are responsible, and because you are responsible, you must receive your just due."

Not too long ago there was a judge on the bench of the Supreme Court of the State of New York who had to hear a very unpleasant case, because it involved the degradation of a young woman's life by the rascal of Hollywood. He was hearing the case of Errol Flynn and this, another woman with whom he had become involved. Let me read for you his decision, or at least part of the decision that was given by the judge:

" - - Doubtless, this unfortunate young woman has been victimized. But by whom? To be sure, Flynn was the immediate occasion for her degradation; but was he the Sorcerer's apprentice who evoked a demon in her, or was he in himself the issue of an evil spirit--one of the creatures which never remains solitary? because every demon evokes its counter-demon in an endless moral chain reaction - - "

Now, you know exactly what the judge is saying. In essence, he's saying neither of these people is really responsible. This woman has been degraded and this man is part of the picture, and maybe he's part of the picture because there is evil in him that called out to the evil in her, for evil itself is never a solitary thing - - one demon always goes looking for another demon. Now, says the judge, this must be reckoned with.....

Well, this is only half of the story. There is evil in every one of us, but this is never meant that we can escape or evade responsibility. If evil is done, it is done through me, and I can't rule myself out of the picture. Whatever you may say about the old Hebrew prophets whatever you may say about the old Hebrew teachers, whatever you may say about the old Men of God who were the Hebrews, you have to say they were terribly honest.

Take David as an example.

Being made aware of his terrible sin, what does he say? I commend to you the 51st Psalm as a chapter in the Old Testament without equal anywhere.... for what happens when a man searches his own soul in the reflected light of God's truth. David says two things:

"In sin did my mother conceive me"

...I have done what I have done because this has
been my nature - -

...but David happens to remember that God is a God of justice and God fixes responsibility - - God has a way of focusing His eye upon people....and then David also says, even though he has said, "In sin did my mother conceive me" - - David says:

"But against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done
this evil in Thy sight"

...my nature may be sinful, but I am the sinner, and
against You only, O God, have I done this thing.....

The Old Testament writers and thinkers and preachers and prophets are far ahead of us because we deal too cheaply with God. Whenever you remove the element of justice you cheapen God, for a God who lacks justice, a God who is not concerned with responsibility, is not a God worth honoring, and what is more, is not a God worth trusting. It's a shameful thing what we Christians have done to God when we make Him too much the God of mercy at the expense of a God of justice. He is a Holy, Righteous Heavenly Father, who while He is just, also loves....but the lamentable thing about us is that we always want the end before the beginning - - we want to talk about mercy, at the expense of a God who is just.

One of the most difficult things that I have as a Pastor, to exercise the role that every pastor ought to have with his people--the confessor--who hears the sins of his people..

...this is what happens when you come seeking someone that you might trust, in God, and I listen to you, and you put your sin out in front of me

...the most difficult thing I have to do is say

Yes, you are guilty...

Yes, you have done this terrible thing...

Yes, you are to blame...

No, you can't point your finger at somebody else - -

...and all the while you may sit there...you'd almost give your right hand to hear somebody tell you that you are not guilty, that you are not to blame; but in God's name I am to be true to my calling. I can't possibly call black white, and I can't possibly call sin goodness. Evil is evil, sin is sin, God is a God of justice who is tremendously interested in fixing responsibility. But we of

the contemporary world have allowed ourselves to become so foolish as to forget about His justice and to talk only about grace. When we talk about grace at the expense of justice we make grace cheap.

An interesting thing happened a number of years ago. A Professor Leuba from Bryn Mawr decided to make a study of God and immortality. He sent out a questionnaire to the leading professors in certain colleges and institutions. Professor Leuba had a notion that the more intellectual a person is, the less need he had for faith in God and the less faith he had in God. And he knew a measure of delight when the replies came in. He divided his professors into three categories, Class A, Class B, Class C, from the most learned to the less learned. And he said, "Ah, here it is - - more professors in Class C have greater faith in God and the meaning of God in history than professors in Class B and A.".....but his delight was short-lived; for he had to recognize the fact that this was not true in one particular group of professors in particular. Who were they? the historians - - the historians more so than the mathematicians, the scientists, the psychologists. The historians as a group maintained a deep and abiding faith in God because as they studied history they could not possibly ignore the fact of God, and that this God who deals with men is a moral God, and God has a way of balancing the book and eventually seeing that every man gets his just dues----that every group of people on the face of the earth get their just due----that no one can be just pushed around at the expense of basic human personality. The God of history is a God who is moral, a God who deals with justice in His relationship with people.

Thomas Jefferson, who didn't have nearly as much faith in the personal God as you and I have, reminds us of a statement that he made. He said, "I shudder when I remember that God is just." I began my ministry during the war years. 365 young men and women from that parish served under colors--almost an

average size congregation in itself. And as I ministered to them I couldn't help but discover the kind of prayers they were offering unto God. It came out so easily, you see, in the casual conversation. They had invested human life in the cause. How well I could understand when they prayed, they put blinders on God.....

.."God, don't think in terms of the Germans

.."God, don't think in terms of the Japanese

.."God, think in terms of us - - give us victory

...our cause is right....our cause is just - - "

...I'm not standing here for the moment to plead the cause of one group of people as over against another group of people. I only know one thing. When I stand at this sacred desk, I remember that when God looks down from Heaven above, God sees people---people who make up the world, for whom He gave His Son, that the whole world might be saved. And whenever you and I turn to God and put blinders on His eyes, and ask Him to think in terms of us as over against thinking in terms of other people, we make Him something less than a God of justice.

I'm not so sure that that symbol for justice is a good one....where she's blindfolded. Oh, I know what they're trying to imply, but how can a blind judge, spiritually, morally or physically, deal honestly with people? Justice hands down the decision that Justice hands down simply because she is able to see, and in seeing, takes every factor into consideration.

It's a shameful thing, what we Christians have done to God, when we make Him only a God of compassion - - my God. We call justice a Christian virtue, but the characters of the Old Testament were far ahead of us in understanding the meaning of justice. Why must we make more of justice than we do? for the simple reason that you can't possibly appreciate mercy - - you can't possibly understand

the meaning of forgiveness, until you first see yourself as the responsible one, against whom justice itself requires an indictment.

Let me talk first about your being guilty, then prove yourself contrite, then you have the amazing story of God's forgiveness.....but you can never know the story of God's undying love without appreciating to the full the fact that He is a God of justice, who can shake His finger and say - -

"thou are the guilty one - - "

and at the same time, with His hand outstretched, can say - -

"but guilty as you are, I am a God of love and

I will never give you up."

...maybe it's only at that point that we begin to understand how wonderful God is, because honestly, we deserve to be given up. He knows it, but He holds on to us just the same.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "TEMPERANCE"

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues." The virtue to be discussed in this sermon is the virtue called "Temperance;" the text, the 25th verse of the 24th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

It was an exciting moment in the life of the Apostle Paul. I am not so sure that I ought to begin the sermon with that statement, for it means that there were other moments that weren't as exciting. In reality, every moment that the Apostle Paul seemed to live was fraught with unusual significance. He looked upon any opportunity that he might have as a time of unusual challenge and stimulation by which to confront people with the gospel of Jesus Christ; and yet when he came to this moment in his life, there was something just a little bit different about it, for in reality this was the moment when two worlds were about to meet...

...the world of an itinerant tent-mender who had given

his life to Jesus Christ and allowed Jesus Christ to completely control it and to direct it

...and on the other hand, the man, Felix by name, the

Roman governor, who was a scoundrel, who as an unscrupulous man had given his life to intrigue, to do anything, so long as it accomplished the purpose that he had in mind, completely ignoring other relationships with

people....

...so having been summoned by the governor, this tiny itinerant tent-mender is confronted by Felix.

Paul can't do anything but what he is accustomed to doing. He tells Felix about the Kingdom of God--he tells Felix about Jesus Christ. And in the course of the conversation he tells to this man, this very unusual man (incidentally, the only one in Roman history who, as a slave, became a governor of a province) ...he says to this man "If you're interested in Jesus Christ, I must talk to you about righteousness, I must talk to you about temperance and I must talk to you about the judgment which is to come."

And then Felix allows the conversation to come to an end--almost dismisses Paul summarily: "You go now; some other time we'll talk about this, not now."

Well, that's about the way it always happens. Allow any man to understand that somehow this business of Jesus Christ is tied up with his own personal life, and that this Jesus Christ makes demands upon him personally, the initial reaction is: "Let's talk about this some other time - - I'm not quite prepared right now to sell myself, body and soul, to Jesus Christ." This is the peculiar nature of man...stubborn as he is, there is the refusal to recognize that even God has any kind of claim upon his personal life, upon his personal life in the sense that it affects other people's personal lives.

You can't talk about justice without fixing responsibility. You can't possibly think about justice without seeing yourself in the picture as an agent responsible for dealing with justice where other people are involved. And now when it comes to this whole matter of temperance, which, if you want to translate it, means moderation...self-mastery...self-control,...propriety - - this means that somehow God is going to interfere with my life, God's going to tell me what I can do and what I can't do - - God's going to tell me how far I can go and how

far I ought not to go. Felix, smart man that he was, and with whatever sensitivity he had for this itinerant tent-mender, with whatever willingness that he first had to hear the man out, was perceptive enough to understand that this whole thing could get Felix involved and could ultimately mean the claim of God upon his own personal life.

Now it so happened that Felix was married three times--it so happened that his third wife was a woman that he stole from another man. What does that mean? It means that he had a certain kind of appetite...it means that he had a certain kind of sexual urge that he could not control. His record as a Roman governor was an open book. He followed his impulse and he did this as it suited him. He had no kind of self-mastery, that other people might know benefit from the decisions that he made as a man, or as a governor. Felix says to the Apostle Paul then....."This is it. We won't talk about it any more."

It wasn't exactly a parallel. I remember it happened in the New Member Group session here in Saint Luke Church not very many years ago....

....why it hadn't happened before, I'm not quite certain, and it's only happened once since, and I can't quite explain that either - -

...but as I recall it, it was the last group session before they were to be received formally into this parish. And one of the men spoke up and said - -

"Pastor, would you mind telling us - - you haven't touched upon it yet....what does the Lutheran church teach concerning gambling? what does the Lutheran church exact from its member as far as drinking alcoholic beverages is concerned? where does the Lutheran church stand on this issue or that issue? I think I'd like to have this cleared up before I join next Sunday."

He had a perfect right to raise the question, because this whole relationship with

the body of believers, this membership in a congregation which is an expression of one's commitment to Jesus Christ, does mean involvement--could mean the interference on the part of God with a man's life, as he lives it with other people, especially. Well, the Lutheran church has an answer to these questions, and we root and ground them in Scripture.....and he got his answer, and he became a member of this congregation.

But, now, when you talk about these virtues you may say to yourself: well, temperance isn't really a Christian virtue, as such, is it? No. Not any more than wisdom is a Christian virtue. Not any more than courage is a Christian virtue. Not any more than justice is a Christian virtue.....

....incidentally, it was Cicero who wrote a letter to his son in which he was giving advice and counsel, and in that letter he tells him that there are four cardinal principles by which any rational human being ought to order his life, and if his life could not square up to these four principles, his life would be lived in vain - - and one of them was this principle called temperance.....or moderation...

self-control...

self-mastery.

Long before Jesus Christ there were those who made temperance a virtue, and even the ancient Greeks maintained that it was a cardinal principle of life that nothing should ever be done to excess...this is temperance... moderation...

self-control....

self-mastery.

Now when you come to the New Testament, when you come to the Apostle Paul-- whether you've forgotten it or not, I am not quite certain, but in the moment of

sober reflection you may have to admit that Paul was always talking about this whole matter of self-control -- this Epistle Lesson for today, do you remember it?.....a man who is married to a woman, says the Apostle Paul, should learn how to control himself, even in relationship with his own wife. That's a man in Jesus Christ talking to another man -- temperance.....moderation....self-control.....self-mastery.

Now the Christian church begins at the point at which it ought to begin. The Christian church says Yes, there is such a thing in man as appetite, urge, impulse, inner drive. We have no traffic with people who say this is not true. But there was a time in our history, in the Victorian Period, of course, when we didn't talk very much about it, and some people permitted themselves to believe that just such a kind of world didn't exist: that is, a world of appetite, impulse, inner drive and urge.

The Christian church takes the next step, in company with all rational human beings. Appetite, drive, impulse, urge -- they do exist...but they must be controlled. A man was not meant to be a pig. A man was not meant to be like a bull. These must be controlled and mastered.

But the Christian church goes one step farther. And the Christian church says, now all of this has to take place: this moderation, this self-mastery, this self-control....not for a man's sake alone, but for the sake of Jesus Christ. He learns to control himself because God in Christ demands it. This is the motivation that determines whether a man drinks or whether he doesn't drink.....

....that determines whether a man gambles or whether he doesn't
gamble

....determines whether a man plays fast and loose with his
sexual drive or not

...his decision is made as over against his relationship to Jesus Christ.

For once a man becomes a Christian he recognizes the fact that Jesus Christ died for him. And Jesus Christ says,

"You are important to me. I died for you.

Now your life is so important that you can't
possibly become the best possible person
unless you are motivated and directed by my
love for you."

...this is what determines, on the part of the individual Christian, what he does or what he doesn't do. He controls his urges, his impulses, not just because he feels he'll go to Heaven because of this, but he does it out of the love of Christ. A man's body, a man's appetite, is important to God. And God says - -

"Every decision that you make in this relationship
you make on the basis of my love for you and my
purpose in your life."

I would never want to be part of a religion that gives a man a handbook that says you're not a Christian if you smoke....you are not a Christian if you drink....you are not a Christian if you gamble - - so that a man becomes Christian by the things he does not do! The love of God in Christ which claims him is Jesus Christ, who says:

"Here I am; and here you are.

- - in the face of my love for you, then there are
certain things that I ask that you do, in response
to my love for you."

And you know what happens sometimes? The strangest of all things happens.....

...a man not only lives a life of moderation, but he reaches the point where he abstains, completely, from certain things. And the reason? It's the love of Christ that compels him to do it.

The strange thing about the Christian claim upon a man's life is this: that for some people in Christ they just can't be content in moderation, but because of what God has done for them in Christ, there are certain appetites they will curb completely, to the glory of Jesus.

This sermon now comes to an end by reminding you that Felix dismissed the Apostle Paul summarily as soon as the Apostle Paul told him that this business of the Christian religion had to do with justice, or righteousness....temperance ...self-control, self-mastery, moderation.

And Felix said to the Apostle Paul, "This is it."

And we have no record that Felix ever made up his mind to become a Christian. He stopped at that point.

There are some people who have gone straight to Hell because they never realized that at a precise moment in their life they had to make a decision not to go to Hell. Even such a decision in favor of moderation is a decision that had to be made precisely. We who respect Alcoholics Anonymous find much of their virtue in the fact that a man has to make up his mind today, and this accounts for a great deal of their success. All that today really means in the face of tomorrow is simply this: either,

"I'm glad I did."

...OR...

"I wish I had."

A man had a dream once. Satan was looking over the Kingdom of Man. And

Satan was heard to say,

"How can I get complete hold of man, so that I never lose him?"

And one of his cohorts said,

"Satan, let me go abroad upon all the earth and I'll tell you what I'll do: to every man I meet, I'll tell him how easy it is to go to Hell - - I'll make it as attractive as I possibly can!"

And Satan says,

"No, I'm not so sure that will work for every man.

I want something that will be a sure success every time you try it."

And then another of Satan's cohorts said,

"Let me go to every man that I meet and I'll tell him how hard it is to get to Heaven."

Satan said,

"No, I'm not so sure that would work, either.

I want something that will be an almost guaranteed success in every case."

And one of Satan's cohorts, the third, came forward and he said,

"I have it, your Majesty.

Let me go to every man on earth that I meet and tell him that there's no need to be in any kind of a hurry to make up his mind, one way or another."

And the broadest smile came upon the face of Satan.

He said, "I know of no surer way to get them forever!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "FAITH"

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues"; and the virtue to be considered now is the virtue called "Faith". The text, the 11th chapter of Hebrews, the 6th verse:

"Without faith it is impossible to please him - - "

Tell me now, as you imagine the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth, did He ever find Himself scolding people? You've pictured Him ever so frequently with the hands outstretched and blessing, but did you ever picture Him with His hand raised and His finger in stern rebuke? Well, if you've never done that, you ought to make room in your collection of pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ for this moment and that moment when He took people to task, for He did rebuke people.

And do you know why He rebuked them? Oddly enough, it wasn't always because they didn't have love in their hearts for each other; oddly enough, it wasn't always because they didn't know the law and they couldn't recite the Ten Commandments. But most frequently it was for this reason: they didn't have enough faith to suit Him. He rebuked them because they were men of little faith! You read the Scriptures as though you were reading the Scriptures for the first time, and this might be your reaction - - that when, seemingly, He was impatient with them, seemingly, when He had to rebuke them, most often it was because they lacked faith.

And the reason is obvious: without faith, they could not recognize Him as He was...

The reason is obvious: without faith, the necessary ground-work would not be present by which the miracles could be performed....

The writer of the New Testament says every now and then He had to leave a place because there was not faith, they lacked faith, they would not believe, and because they would not believe, they would not accept Him...and because they would not accept Him, the wonderful work that He wanted to do He was unable to do. No wonder, then, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews said,

"Without faith it is impossible to please him."

I am surprised, as you may be surprised, to discover the burden of the concern of Jesus Christ seemed to be not only that men were lost and He went looking for them, but that He had to spend so much of His time encouraging them to have faith and to believe. I say to you this morning, that of all the Christian virtues, the one most essential, perhaps, the one that is truly basic, is the virtue called faith. For when you and I have faith in God, His purpose, then everything else seems to fall into a rightful pattern. All other things will come, once a man can believe in God, the nature of God, and in himself and his place for God's plan in his life.

When Dr. Edmund Steinis took up his teaching post at our Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, he surprised his students when he gave this rather unusual challenge, - - in words like these.....

- - Now, I want you to start working on a sermon.

When you prepare this sermon, I want the reader, once he has read it, to have a very clear understanding of what God is like--the nature and the character of God. And if you ever preach the sermon that you are now about to begin, prepare it keeping in mind that once you have finished it, there shan't be any question in anybody's mind who has heard the sermon that you were talking about God, and the kind of God that the Christian worships.

But, he said, in this sermon, I don't want you to
use the name of God more than twice!

Now you see, his point is well taken.

We who use so frequently the well-familiar words of the Christian faith sometimes fail to appreciate what they actually mean because we become so conditioned to the word itself.

What, now, do you understand by this word faith which is such an important word in the vocabulary of the Christian? What does it mean to you? Not that I should parade it in front of you, but with the discipline that I exacted from myself, only using the word as an introduction - -

Faith is: ...seeing life in the dimension which is God

Faith is: ...seeing God in everything

Faith is: ...realizing that God has a purpose and a plan, and I, as an
individual am tied up in that plan

or, if I have to borrow the words of somebody else - -

... "for I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I commit
unto him against that day, for all things work together for
good to them who love the Lord"

This is what faith is: ...to believe that God exists

...that God has the last word

...that nothing happens except God takes note of it,
and God has a way of working it into His plan and
into His purpose

...now really, that's what faith is.

At least, for the moment, I'm willing to say that's what it is.

Ah! you caught it, didn't you - "at least, for the moment--"for this is
the strange thing about us. Our faith wavers. Sometimes our faith is strong;

sometimes our faith is weak. And all of us perchance are like the character in one of Victor Hugo's plays; when asked "Do you believe?"...and the character says, "Yes - - No - - sometimes - -"

...this is your story, this is my story....

...faith, the basic essential in the life of the Christian - - sometimes we have it, sometimes we don't....sometimes more, sometimes less. Ah, you don't fool me, and you don't fool one another, and we don't fool God! - - ten minutes ago, when we stood up, man to man, as a congregation, as with one voice:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven
and earth - - -"

...so steadily we said it!

...so surely we expressed it!

...and yet I have been here long enough to know that your faith is not always steadfast, and your faith is not always sure; and who knows, one of these days in my relationship with you as a pastor, when life itself might tumble in on you, you might surprise me by how much faith you have...or how little faith you have. We can't possibly talk about faith without recognizing the fact that we waver. We can't possibly talk about faith without remembering that when Christ was here on earth He had to rebuke them most often because they didn't have enough faith.

Joseph Parker, well-known preacher of City Temple Church in London, at the age of 68, with the utmost of self-assurance, told his congregation: "I have not had a religious doubt. I have always believed firmly in God."

...the man had to eat his words. Within six months God took from him, as we have a right to say, his wife. She died a miserable death. And then, at age 68, Joseph Parker knew what it was to have religious doubt, to wonder whether or not he could always say that this hand of God was the hand of a gracious loving Father.

...and all of a sudden he sees how this hand can snatch, and how, perchance, God might be looking the other way when a devil performs a miserable deed.

Robert Frost, may his memory always be blessed, didn't concern himself with everything that he wrote with religion as the subject, but once he did write, something to this effect - - that it's a healthy thing for every man, at some stage in his life, to wreck himself against an antagonist--to have to do battle recklessly against a foe; and his implication is that in doing so, he might recognize his dependence upon a God who can supply the strength that he needs in his time of weakness. Says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

"Without faith it is impossible to please him."

Faith is the basic essential in the life of the Christian.

Yet not everyone has it.

Gmar Khayyam has written:

"Into this universe,
And I not knowing, nor whence,
Like water, willy-nilly flowing,
And out of it, as wind along the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.
'Tis all a checker-board of nights and days,
Where destiny with men for pieces plays;
Hither and thither moves, and mates and sleeps,
And one by one, back in the closet lays."

...for him, the seer--for him, the searcher,
life had no meaning, there's no plan,
there's no purpose.

Bertrand Russell:

"Brief and powerless is man's life;
On him and on his race the slow, sure doom
falls pitiless and dark,
Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction,
Omnipotent might rolls on its relentless way
for man condemned."

...this is the way people think - -

...this is the way people talk who have no faith - -

- - in God, the purpose, the meaning of life.

G. A. Studdard-Kennedy, a chaplain in World War I, told how he wrecked himself against the antagonist which is life, and wondered as he went out into the dark and looking up into the sky with its ~~xxxi~~ million stars, whether there is any meaning to life at all. And he cried out for an answer.

And he says, "Well, I made my cry, and I got my answer.

I have often doubted it, never entirely understood it,
but it remains.

If I lost it, I think I would lose my soul.

I have been trying to say it ever since.

At the time the answer was only one word--GOD

And so it remains."

But beloved, it isn't enough to say have faith in God.

We must sit at the feet of Jesus Christ and understand the nature of the
God in whom we have faith.

It is never enough to say have faith - - unless you understand the one
in whom you have faith, what He's like, and what, perchance, He

plans to accomplish through you.

Last evening a handful of us were privileged to see some of the very vivid dramatization of life in central Africa today. And among the pictures, the natural scene of life as it exists among some of these people, the fetish--their token of their belief--this suggested element of their faith. And what is it?

...a tiny mound of earth

...a stone

...and even, in one case, two soft-drink bottles,
with a canopy

---this spot is called sacred.

....so they had faith.

It's never enough to say have faith, because your faith rises or falls according to the god in whom you have faith.

For us Christians it's faith in God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what does that mean?

It means that God is.....

...and when you understand the life of Jesus Christ, you
say to yourself - -

...God cares

...God loves

...God has the last word

....God can't be defeated

...and then I order my life accordingly.

For to believe, according to the Anglo-Saxon, is "to live by." Let me tell you this with all the ardor of my soul: you may stop thinking about what you believe in God, but you never stop living by what you believe in God, and every step that you and I take through life is determined by what we either believe or don't believe about God. We may stop thinking, but no man ever stops

living. I must tell you this....

....Canon Wedel, from the College of Preachers over at St. Alban's I think originated this story, at least in telling it so frequently when he spoke.

...it's the account of a youngster in a hospital who presumably had never been told the story of God. Afflicted with an incurable disease, he was not long for this side of the Great Gate. It rested heavily upon the mind of a nurse that a child should die without some knowledge of God...and so she begged the social worker whom she knew to visit the child, and with the limited amount of time, to compress into one story, brief as it may be, the whole story of God which in itself might engender faith on the part of the child about to die. So she came.

And she said,

My friend, a long, long time ago, in fact there's never a time when He wasn't, and He'll always be, there was Someone who made the world. He made the world because He loved it, and He said it was a good world.

And when the world became bad, He loved it so much that He wouldn't turn His back on it, and He came down from the place where He was and He lived here on earth. And while He was here people called Him Jesus.

And everywhere He went He loved people.

And then one day He went back to Heaven. But every now and then He comes down from Heaven, and in His big strong arms He takes someone like you, and He holds you very closely to Himself. And He takes you to Heaven, and that's where you stay forever and ever.

Now, that's all that she said. There are other parts of the story that

you might want to have added, but the basic element is there:

- - that the God in whom Christians believe is the God
who made us
- - the God who never turns His back on us
- - and the God who loves us and wants us to be with Him
forever and ever.

This is what you believe, my friend, and the life that you live should reflect it. It's the most important single asset that you have.

By the shores of a lake one night three men sat. And as they lay bare their souls, they talked about their greatest losses.

One man told about his financial reverses.

The other man spoke about the deterioration of his own life - - how
he lost his wife and his children.

And the third man said:

"Sad losses ye have met,

But mine is saddest yet,

For the believing heart has gone from me."

.....may that never happen to you.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

THE SEVEN VIRTUES - "HOPE"

The sermon today is the next to the last in the series based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues;" and the virtue to be considered in this sermon is the virtue called "Hope". And the text, from the First Epistle General of Peter, the 1st chapter, the 3rd verse:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

It was last Sunday at the 11:00 o'clock hour that I had an experience the like of which I had never had before in my ministry. Plagued by this cold these many weeks, I had a coughing spell and was unable to finish the sermon. In fact, only half of the sermon was preached at the 11:00 o'clock hour. I turned my back on the pulpit, was able to finish the service eventually, and then I went to my office.

And from my office window I looked at the congregation as they went by the church walk on this side of the Nave. And I had a peculiar psychological reaction, something inside of me kept crying out: "But I only told you half the story this morning--you only heard half of the sermon--the other half is yet to be told." If only somehow I could have mustered enough strength, this peculiar reaction that came to me, so that I could have gone out in the street and said-- "Wait! Wait! You must hear the rest of it!"

...well, that's what happened to me last Sunday morning.

And since that time I have been evaluating my preaching, the preaching ministry which God has allowed me these more than two decades. And this is a salutary thing, something that a man ought to do every now and then - - look back

over the years and ask himself as to whether or not he has been telling the whole story - -

whether his sermon comes abruptly to an inconclusive end

in the middle of a sermon -

or whether, perhaps, he has spoken for a full twenty minutes

and then walked away from the pulpit -

...has he told the full story?

I likened this to an experience that I had less than six months ago.

I saw her at the back of the Nave when the 11:00 o'clock hour was over-- she and her husband of two days, including Saint Luke Church in their honeymoon. I had baptized her, I had confirmed her in the Christian faith. Winifred invited them for Sunday dinner. They came to the Parsonage, and we sat there and talked.

And in the course of the meal it occurred to me that this young woman, now establishing a home, had sat under my preaching in the impressionable years of her life; for the greater part of her life she had never known any other preaching than mine. And I took myself to task, wondering how fully and completely the story of God's love and God's truth had been told her.

Now with both of these experiences as a background, I have been evaluating my preaching of the last two decades.

Well, there's one thing I can say about it if you can't say it: it hasn't been the hellfire, brimstone and damnation variety. I can remember from the impressionable days of my childhood, however, that there was a time when that preaching was much in vogue. The revivalists who came to our small town and set up their stand overnight would bring the changes, in much of the tradition of old Cotton Mather, who in his hey-day in New England held his congregation on the edge of their benches as he told them about the soul damning and hell-fire in the time of Judgment, and how he preached about that for hour after hour on a Sunday. Well,

even in the days of my childhood I can remember that there was something of that kind of preaching.

But I'm now of a different generation. By and large, in the pulpits of the contemporary church, you wouldn't go Sunday after Sunday and hear the preacher striking the old note of Hell. I don't know that this has been a disadvantage for you or not. I know one thing...in whatever years God allows me as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, I will preach more and more about the note of Eternity, the fact of Judgment, and the relationship of your present moment to all that is to come. I shall fail if in the preaching of any sermon there has not been the background of Eternity. The Executive Secretary of the World Council of Churches is perfectly right when he says about us, that we in the 20th century, Christians, are a people for whom Hell has lost its terror; Hell having lost its terror, Heaven has no invitation. This could be our purpose: that we live for today and today alone, and have no fear of Hell, have no desire to go to Heaven.

You can see the trend of my mind, especially in the preparation of this sermon that deals with Hope.....

I ask myself when I think of Hell - (and I think it's a healthy thing to think about Hell every now and then)....I ask myself: what must be the most terrible thing about Hell?

- - not that one would be separated from God's people and
those who love him in the saints--this could be terrible,
of course - -

...but for me, at the moment, I think the most terrible thing about Hell must be this: that everything is fixed--permanent....and there is no hope for the situation to improve. I once had an old Seminary professor who told me his idea of Hell was a man to get everything that he ever wanted--for himself, for himself alone, and then to have to spend Eternity with himself on his hands, and only him-

self--fixed at that point. Yes, for me, for the moment at least, the most terrible thing about Hell must be that it's a fixed status, and there is no hope. Dante, you see, was the theologian when he pictured Hell and the Inferno - - he had a slogan that was written over the entrance: "Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here" It's only when you think about Hell and the fact that there could be no hope that you begin to realize, perhaps, how precious a thing hope is....

...that there's always a tomorrow

and for the Christian that tomorrow is always in the
hand of God. This is what hope is.

I wish I could have brought the exact words for you to the pulpit this morning--someone who tried to put his finger upon the pulse-beat of our generation said that there is an unexpressed fear on the part of people, and perhaps unacknowledged by them, that the world has slipped out of the control of God. Now this may or may not be the exact quotation, but I'll tell you what he had in mind: he had been trying to size up the present picture of the world, and for the first time in the history of man we've brought ourselves to the precipice, where man with all of his learning and scientific prowess could destroy his world. This is the world in which we live. And when a man starts thinking very soberly about that, he says, why man can do this! Now if man can do it, where is the control of God? aha! where's God's finger? --if this is what man can do to himself and his world. And if God is not to be reckoned with, then there is no such thing as hope. And maybe that's the word for our generation....we are a people without hope.

But this ought never to be said of the Christian.

It actually happened. The man was chairman of a committee meeting for his church. I don't know what the situation was, but it was serious enough to warrant

an emergency meeting, and as his pastor had schooled and trained them, they never began any meeting, whatever it was, without a prayer. In the absence of the pastor, and he should have done it whether the pastor was present or not, the chairman offered the prayer. The prayer went something like this:

"Almighty and Merciful God, whose strength is sufficient for all things, be with us now and help us. Amen."

...and then he said something like this:

- - "As chairman of the meeting, I've called you because this is urgent. Something has happened, brethren, and as far as I'm concerned, as I size up the situation, nothing can be done about it--it's absolutely hopeless."

You sense the incongruity, don't you?

"Almighty and Merciful God, whose strength is sufficient for all things - - "

...and in the next breath

"Brethren, we face a hopeless situation--nothing can be done about it."

Well, the true Christian never talks like that.

The true Christian has hope that somehow, somewhere, the situation can be re-deemed and resolved by the purposes of God.

Now, make no mistake about it, hope, for the Christian, is not wishful thinking. I can wish that tomorrow it might be a bright and beautiful day, and I may go today on that assumption--wishful thinking...but I can't possibly see how I have any right to say "I hope tomorrow will be a bright and beautiful day", for hope roots and grounds itself in the purpose, the nature and the character of God, and whether I personally wish tomorrow to have sunshine or not may be absolutely irrelevant to the mind and purpose of God. So much of our hope, as we think of it, is nothing but wishful thinking--it has no substance

whatsoever.

When Peter wrote this text as he wrote it, it was in the year 65A.D., as black a period in the history of the Christian Church that we have ever known....

...read for yourself who was Emperor at that time

...read for yourself what was the status of the Christian,

or rather, the lack of status of the Christian, in society

...read for yourself how they lived in the catacombs

...read for yourself how they were the driven and the persecuted

...and against that background, Peter said:

"Blessed by the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten
us to a living hope since Jesus Christ
arose from the dead - - "

The older I become, the more I fear one thing and one thing in particular: that I may become like many of the elders that I have known, who live in the past, who talk only about the good that was done yesterday. The curse of advanced age is that you stop, and you look back. Hope never looks back, in only in doing so that it might look ahead; for hope is rooted and grounded in the fact that it always has the forward look. I wish I could tell you that everything that you plan and purpose will work out exactly as you dream--so you might wish--so you might even hope. But it doesn't always occur that way. I'm realistic enough to know that we live in the kind of a world that's described by the man who said, as he wrote about the "Worst Possible Christmas" - -

..."When Daddy went off to work in the morning, he kissed his children goodbye, and his wife, and he said 'We'll be back and we'll have a wonderful Christmas'. ...and the three children lived for the prospect of Daddy's return, Christmas Eve. And they begged their mother if they could only wait until Daddy came home,

bearing the gifts---oh, they'd wait until Christmas Day to open them, but just to see Daddy come in the door bearing the gifts!they thought they heard Daddy, but then they weren't quite sure because it wasn't quite like Daddy. But it was Daddy. He was coming home.....drunk.....intoxicated--the money had been spent....bearing no gifts. For this the children had hoped. They cried themselves to sleep....."

This is the kind of world in which this kind of thing can happen.

We are human beings.

We are creatures of the flesh.

We can disappoint.

But somehow the early Christians believed that no matter how people might disappoint them, God would never disappoint them, and in this fact was the ground for their hope, and no matter how dismal the present would be, there would always be a tomorrow, and in that tomorrow would be God. Not only that, if today and this present world would be one disappointment after another, for the Christian there is always the prospect of Heaven, and this gave them hope.

Beloved, I am your Pastor. And if only I could sit down with you, person-to-person, family by family, and then that you might do what I might do for you, give you evidence for despair.....and if you were prone to say the situation is hopeless, as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, I would be constrained to say to you as far as God is concerned---no situation is ever hopeless. And I'm wondering sometimes if this isn't the crowning virtue of all the virtues of the Christian faith. At least I'll tell you this - - - when my last hour comes, and I stand in the moment of Judgment before God, and I suffer the despair of my soul when I see all of my sins, I shall cling to one thing - - hope, that God who is God will have mercy.....and that's the only thing I know that helps me to become just a little bit better, right now.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 31, 1963

"The Seven Virtues - LOVE"

Today's sermon is the last in the series based upon the general theme, "The Seven Christian Virtues"; and the subject today is the virtue called "Love"; and the text, verses 7 and 8 from the 4th chapter of First John:

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

These are the words of an old man. We can well afford to listen to them because they're the words of an old man who was exceedingly wise. He had seen a great deal occur in his lifetime. He was one of the few remaining disciples. As he remembered when his Lord was here on earth, there was an exceedingly precious relationship between Christ and the disciples, and they knew something of the love of God through Christ for a human being, for they were numbered in that company.

The weeks, the months, the years have passed; almost a generation had gone on. Something of the first love had begun to disappear. Where there was once unity, there is now division among the people. There are those who look to the old man for advice.

Imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, he calls out to them wherever they may be...and his message is always the same - - Love.

"Brethren - -

"Little children - -

"Beloved - - -

- - let us love one another, for God is love, and he who loves has God in his heart, and he who loves knows God

- - he who does not love does not have God; he
who does not love does not know God - - "

For this grand old man it was as simple as that.

And what Christians must always remember is that for them and their vocabulary,
the most precious word of all is the word love.

But as I come to this sacred desk this morning I am very much aware of the
fact that that word love, while it is exceedingly precious, is perhaps of all
words the most abused and the most mis-used. What would you think if I were to
tell you this: that as far as the Christian is concerned, the day should never
come when he had anything less than love in his heart for anybody else. What
would you think if I were to tell you, putting it another way, that a Christian
is in duty bound to love everyone. Now that's the word we're talking about.
It is not easily understood. It is not always appreciated.

We are not as fortunate, we who have the English tongue, as our friends the
Greeks. They knew that there would have to be this confusion with this word
love....and they had not only one word for love--they have three different words,
because love does not always mean the same thing to everyone. We do well to
benefit from their understanding of that word.

For some of the Greeks, when they used the word love, they used it in their
relationship with people--the kind of relationship that existed between two peo-
ple when one person treated another person with some kind of kindness only be-
cause in his relationship with that person he was able to get something.....

- - he said he loved that person as long as he could use that person...

- - he loved that person as long as the relationship that existed
between them was always to his advantage

...the youngster says "I love vanilla ice cream" because

vanilla ice cream to him is pleasant and delightful and brings him a certain measure of satisfaction; when he reaches the place where vanilla ice cream no longer brings him a pleasant taste, he will no longer say that he loves vanilla ice cream...

...the Greeks were that honest with themselves. They said they loved certain people as long as they could use them, and as long as they brought them a certain measure of satisfaction.

I am not blind to the fact that last night, perhaps, many a man picked up an easy date, to spend several hours with her, never again, perchance, to see her...but she was used, and she brought him, in one way or another, a measure of satisfaction; and in that relationship, make no mistake about it, that word love, no doubt, crept into the conversation....but never again to see her. The relationship, fleeting as it might have been, existed so long as it brought him, or her, a measure of satisfaction. Ah, the Greeks were that honest. They said sometimes we use the word love when we simply mean there's someone to be used and there is a satisfaction to be had.

They also had another word for it, as they considered this whole realm of human relationships - - they said this word love is used for two people who have a mutual agreement - - they enter into a kind of contract, it's a 50-50 arrangement.....

- - as long as he treats me with his 50%, I'll treat him with my 50%...

...but I'm not in duty bound to treat him with my 50% unless he treats me with his 50%...

- - and if he should fail to measure up, I need no longer love him
...they had a word for that--it was also in the Latin - - it's filia, which means

a kind of friendship, a friendly arrangement...

- - I give and I take...I take and I give

...this is understood

- - and I will give as long as I can take, and when I
can't take, I don't have to give.

Unfortunately for many people in our day, this is our understanding of love between people.

You know that under God I'm given the responsibility, sometimes, to counsel with people--this is part of my shepherding responsibility. Sometimes there are people who get the shock of their lives when I tell them, trying to echo as best I can the voice of God to them:

....well maybe your marriage isn't a 50-50 proposition....

maybe you've come face to face with the grim sober fact that it's 60-40, and you have to give 60! Perchance you don't call this by its rightful name. You thought that when you got married that from that moment on it would be give-and-take, equally alike. The marriage service doesn't even make any allowance for that kind of thing, does it?

....the marriage service does not say "I will love you, Mary," so John speaks to her, "as long as you are attractive".....the marriage service does not say "I will love you, Mary, so long as it's easy for me to love you"...the marriage service does not say "I will love you, Mary, as long as you hold up your part of the bargain; Mary, as soon as you fail, I don't have to love you any more"

...the marriage service doesn't speak like that in the church. I don't know what it's like in a civil ceremony, but in the church, you see, we have a way of reflecting, somehow, the will of God, we have a way of some-

how mirroring, in our human relationships, the kind of love that we know God has for us - -

- - when we talk about "for richer, for poorer"

"in sickness as well as in health"

"for better - - - for worse"

...and then as though we want it to be fully understood that we're reflecting something of God's love we say

"until death comes"

..that means from here on in!

And that leads us to recognize the fact that the Greeks said, when they were confronted by the Christian ethic and the Christian philosophy, now since these Christians have been around, now since God came to us in Christ, we have to invent a brand new word for love, and they did. Maybe you've seen it. It's a strange looking word and equally strange sounding. It's called agape. It means the kind of love that goes on working for good, no matter what the other person may do to you.....something on my part that compels me to work for good in behalf of somebody else, and I'm not to limit my behaviour pattern by his.

There was a carpenter's son who lived here on this earth who went around living that kind of love, treating people the way He honestly believed God treats people, and making it available to everyone that He met. And then one day He said to a handful of disciples, "This is my commandment to you--that you love one another, even as I have loved you." This is what He said: "This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In the Christian context, in the Christian structure, in the Christian ethic of life, man is in duty bound to treat with genuine good will every man that he meets. This is not easily understood. This is not gener-

ally accepted.

I'd much rather choose those to whom I'm going to be kindly disposed. I'd much rather love only those that I like. Ah, there's the rub, you see! As a Christian I don't have to like everybody that I meet--you know that, don't you? Liking and loving are not the same. Let's be fair with ourselves, even in the presence of God. It is absolutely impossible to like everyone. And even the person that you may like today you may not like tomorrow, because people change! Sometimes we're gracious and easy to like, and our disposition, you see, can fluctuate according to the way we feel, physically or emotionally. But to love, for the Christian, is an obligation that he can't shirk. Jesus said "This is my commandment, that you love."

What did He mean by it?

Love, in the Christian context, is always this: it's activated good will...

...I discipline myself to work in his behalf

...I shall do him no harm, but to the contrary, I shall
work for his good!

...it would be so easy if we wouldn't have to believe this.

...it would be so much more simple if we weren't constantly challenged by the love of God in Christ. You know, of course, what I say to some people - -

"Yes, you can get along without him! and you'd be
happier--make no mistake about it!

...Did it ever occur to you that God can get
along without you?"

I've lived long enough to know that I can't get along without God. I need God's love. When you transplant that to the human relationship: while we can get along without some people, there are some people who can't get along without us. They may not know this, just as human beings may not know that they can't get along

without God, but God in His love is constant, and God makes it available and God offers it, and God in Christ says to us: "This is the way you have to be to the world---this is the way you have to be to one another. You are to make goodness available to them." If they refuse it, that's one thing. If they shun it, that's another thing. To love someone in Christ involves the risk of becoming hurt. Yet can it not be said, in the sight of God the most precious of all the wounds that we may take with us into Heaven may be the wounds that we suffer through our love for people? But God has a way of looking each one of us in the eye and He says, "I'm not saying to you, it would be nice if everybody would be good to each other...I'm not saying this would be a grand old world if everybody treated each other kindly - - "

- - Jesus Christ said, "What I am saying to you is that
you should love--love one another--work for that
person's good."

It's one thing for Jesus Christ to tell us something; it's another thing for Him to give us the example. That's why He said: "I ask you to love one another; and you're wondering how you are to love one another? I'll tell you how you are to love one another - -

" - - you are to love one another, even as I have loved you!"
This is why love is the most wonderful thing in the world.
This is why, every now and then, when you and I come across a person who treats us with something of the love of God in his heart, it's as though we were ushered into the gates of Heaven itself. The old man on the Isle of Patmos was not only old but he was wise, and he knew that what the world needed most - - people to share the love of God.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE KING WHO CRIED"

The sermon on this Palm Sunday bears the title, "The King Who Cried"; and the text is the 41st verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it"

Men, generally speaking, are not given to crying.

And a king? Why should a king ever cry? Doesn't a king have everything that he could want? and if he doesn't have it for the moment, isn't there always a way within reason of getting it?

Men, generally, do not cry.

Kings seldom, if ever.

A god? would a god ever cry?

No matter what you make of it, the God who came to us in the form of Jesus Christ shed His tears, as he beheld the city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.

Some people cry without any reason at all. It's just second nature. But there are others who when they do cry, they have to have a reason for it. Some men cry because the physical pain is far greater than they can bear, and in the weakness of the body and the weakness of the mind and the weakness of the spirit the tears cannot be held back. So there are those who cry because of physical pain.

There are those who cry because the emotional burden of life, when the heart is heavy, is far greater than they can carry, and no matter how brave they may be, the tears have a way of coming, if not in public, at least in private.

There are some people who when they cry have to have their reason. Some people cry because they are sorry for themselves, they have been hurt, and so they cry.

When Jesus Christ cries He must have His reason.

Why did Jesus Christ weep? when He takes this good long look at the Holy City. Why should He cry?

Honestly now, on the surface, there's hardly any reason why He should cry. As far as He's concerned, everything's going according to plan. His destination had always been Jerusalem--He wanted to ride triumphantly into the Holy City. This is taking place. He had planned this entrance, even as prophets before Him had demonstrated their truth in some great action - - so the crowd had gathered - - so He's riding now as the King of Peace....and the people are shouting their hosannas. He had never had a moment quite like this. Should this be a moment for crying, and if it should, they would be tears of joy.

But these are not the tears of gladness which Jesus Christ is shedding as He looks at the Holy City. He ought to be glad, if for no other reason, then surely for this: He is succeeding...this is sheer defiance on His part, and right now it looks as though He is getting away with it. I use the words advisedly--there was a price on His head. The authorities who had it in their power to bring death to Him had made up their minds that He must die. Let Him come as a king, but even this king will die! That's the way they talked in Jerusalem. It was common knowledge that this was going to happen to Him. And He knew it. But now for the moment He comes with the utmost of defiance..."I will face them--unafraid." And everything seems to be going along exceedingly well! There is no intervention, the armed troops have not come to lay hold of

Him, no one has put a hand upon Him. And the only thing for the moment that seems to occur is that there is a group of Pharisees who say, "Master, why don't you quiet these people? They're too noisy--they're too loud in their praise." ...now that's the only untoward thing that's happened so far. Everything seems to be going along beautifully, and yet Jesus Christ, seeing the city of Jerusalem, begins to cry.

I tell you He had His reasons for weeping. He is the God, manger-born King. And He sees the eternal city of Jerusalem...and He is able to look at the city and see a mass of people and behind each face a soul, and He knows exactly what they will do to Him. He knows that He will be crucified, and He begins to cry. Cry for Himself? No. He cries for the people. This is the line of demarcation between His tears and ours....we so easily cry for ourselves.

But when He beheld the city He wept for the city, and the people - -

...He wept for the people who were going to kill Him

...He wept for the people who would reject Him

...He wept for the people to whom God had given the freedom of choice - - rather than choose good they would choose evil, and He knows that He'll be standing there, and there is nothing that He can do about it!

There are parents here this morning who may know exactly whereof I speak. There comes a time in the life of certain parents when they stand by, and they are absolutely powerless to help their children, because their children are emerging, now, as adults, and they want to express themselves, and they have the freedom to choose and they will exercise that freedom....and every now and then in their choices they bring down hell upon them. They can be that foolish! ...and the parents stand by, waiting, until the folly has taken its toll.

We're all children in God's sight...and that greatest of all pictures that we have for God is of a Heavenly Father, and our Heavenly Father waits for us, as in our folly we ruin ourselves. This is exactly what Jesus Christ saw when He beheld the city...

...foolish people who would refuse Him

...foolish people who could choose love, but who
act in hate

...and there is nothing He can do about it.

The hardest picture for any of us to draw of God is the picture of God who has to stand on the sidelines and wait...until we have done with our folly. So He cries - - not sorry for Himself...but sorry for us.

But the tears that He sheds - - He will not allow Himself to be blinded by these tears. Now that's the second thing with which we must deal. So frequently when you and I cry, our tears blind us, and we can't see clearly. We can't see tomorrow, we can't see the hand of God. We can see only our pain, our own tragedy, our own misery.....and these tears blind us to the duty that God still exacts from us, the course that is still to be run, the day's work that must still be done.

Jesus Christ cried His heart out, but He did not say to Himself "I will go no farther--I will not subject myself to what Jerusalem will bring to me - - "He did not allow Himself to be blinded by these tears, but continued on His way, went into the city, persevered with patience even until the very end. You see, God always has a way of exacting from us the last bit of energy required to some duty that must be performed. As long as you live, my friend, God has something for you to do. If there is today, there's always going to be a tomorrow in the hand of God, and God says, "Face it! "...."Continue"

...and so Jesus Christ on the edge of

the city, rather than turning His back and running away, rather than stopping right there and saying - - "I will go no farther", sees beyond His tears and continues.

I wish I could make this sermon as relevant as I possible could for those of you whose burdens are so great that you cry, and the tears come as a natural expression of a heart that suffers anguish and in the temptation that you have to stop and to draw in on your own self. I beg you, as one who has a guardian-like responsibility for your soul, to see beyond the tears to what it is that God still expects you to do. As long as you and I are here, God will never say to us, "You stop at this point".....

...tomorrow will come

...and tomorrow will bring its obligations, its
duties and its responsibilities

...cry if you will

...cry, perhaps, if you must

...but don't allow the tears to blind your eyes
to what must still be done.

And so Jesus Christ went on, to face the folly of men, and to live triumphantly to the very end. He was able to do it because through it all He was conscious of the fact that God had a purpose in His life that had to be served, and nothing, not even the folly of men, could deter it.

Ah, my friends, I could talk to you about the waving of the palm branches, I could talk to you about the shouting of the hosannas - - I could picture to you as best I could how He made the triumphal entry into the Holy City....but on this Palm Sunday I am constrained to remind you that against this back-drop Jesus Christ cried His heart out....not for Himself...but because of the folly of our sins....

...and these tears could not blind Him to what yet had to be done.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AN EXCLUSIVE COMPANY"

The sermon on this glad Easter Day bears the title, "An Exclusive Company" and the text, a portion of the 40th and the 41st verses of the 10th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Him God raised up the third day, and shewed
him openly;
Not to all the people, but unto....us- - "

Tell me now, can this be a true statement? Isn't Jesus Christ for everyone? Why, then, did God raise Him up from the dead, show Him openly, but not to everyone - - only, if you please, to a privileged band?

One cannot toy with the text. You can't tamper with Scripture. This is precisely what the verse says, as the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is reciting a bit of history plus personal experience. He was telling the story of Jesus Christ. He tells how God sent Him into the world, and then he describes for his hearers how this Jesus Christ, God's Great Galilean, went about from one place to another, preaching, teaching, healing, performing miracles--always dealing graciously with people--always loving them. Then, says the writer of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles, they refused Him, they nailed Him to the tree. But the writer goes on to say, "Mark you, God raised Him up after the third day and showed Him openly, but not to everyone--only to us."

Why couldn't the resurrection have been as public as the crucifixion? The crucifixion was a public spectacle. They took Jesus Christ and marched Him down the main street of Jerusalem, on a busy day, at a holiday time. And the crowds quickly gathered. No one was denied a chance to see this. And then,

when they had done with Him in the city, they took Him to the outskirts, and, in a public place - - no one was denied the chance to see - - they crucified Him. Why would God allow the crucifixion to be a public spectacle, and yet the resurrection, the central truth of the Christian religion, seems to be a private matter, personally appropriated, made available only to a privileged few?

My mind raises all kinds of questions.....

God, why didn't you do it the other way?

(you see, this is the way we always talk to God)

God, why didn't you do it the other way?

...why didn't you take Jesus Christ, the Resurrected One, and put Him right down smack in front of Pontius Pilate? why didn't you dangle Him right there in front of Pontius Pilate, haunt him, vex him, irritate him, annoy him? let Pontius Pilate see the folly of his error--to think that he could publicly wash his hands of Jesus Christ! and say it doesn't make any difference what you do with Him, and I won't make up my mind--whatever you want is all right with me--you take Him--I shan't bother

God, why didn't you do it that way?

Why didn't you take the Resurrected Christ and put Him right there in front of Pontius Pilate?

...God, why didn't you take the Resurrected Christ, fresh from the grave, put Him in front of Herod, Herod the King? and then have Jesus Christ say to Herod:

"Herod, I'm a King. I'm King above all kings.

Herod, you had a kingdom, but your kingdom will be gone with the dawn. My Kingdom, Herod, is

forever and forever...and two thousand years from now, Herod, in Saint Luke Church in Silver Spring, in cathedrals and chapels all over the world they'll sing hallelujah choruses because my Kingdom goes on forever and ever. And Herod, if people remember you at all, the only reason they'll remember you is because of Me!"

God, why didn't you do it this way?

...God, why didn't you take the glorified Resurrected Christ, and then snatch Judas Iscariot from Hell, and then this time don't have Jesus Christ say anything.....just let the two of them alone, and somehow fix the eyes of Judas Iscariot that he'll never be able to take them away from the searching eyes of Jesus Christ

God, why didn't you do it that way?

...God, why didn't you take this same Jesus Christ, resurrected from the dead, walk Him up the Via Dolorosa now, the Way of Sorrows...take Him back that same street in Jerusalem, take Him right back to Calvary's brow, let Him stand as the glorified Resurrected One...

--let Him preach to the Roman soldiers

--let Him preach to the Centurian

--let Him preach to the scribes and Pharisees

--let Him shake His finger and say

"But you couldn't get away with it! You had your moment on Friday, and the world grew dark as night. But look at the world now!"

God, why didn't you do it that way?

Why didn't you make it a public spectacle?

Why didn't you go back and allow Jesus Christ to haunt the minds and the hearts of the enemy, the ones who put Him on the Cross?

You know why God didn't do it that way, of course you do.

God does not know delight in irritating people.

God does not know delight in causing people to cringe in fear.

You know very well that had God allowed Jesus Christ to go back and confront Pontius Pilate, Herod, or even Judas, they would have gone stark mad! No man can possibly reject Jesus Christ, close his heart to Him, and then have the Resurrected Christ stand in front of him, and keep his senses. With whatever senses they could keep they would have yelled to Jesus, "Go away! Don't bother us! You frighten us--begone!" They would not have pleaded for mercy, for they were the ones whose hearts were closed to Jesus Christ, they were the ones who rejected Him, they were the ones who went on saying: "No! No! No!".....that's the other translation for "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

But it pleased God to bring back His precious Son from the grave to make Him clearly seen, but as the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles says, "But not to everyone - - to us." And the fascinating thing is that when He revealed Himself to an exclusive company, it was not always in the same way. He came back, but not always in the same form...

...mark you, to Mary, in the cool of the Resurrection Garden, to someone who looked like a gardener, not in regal splendor

...to discouraged fishermen by the seashore He came as an apparition

...to two men who kept on the way to Emmaus, traveling toward the sunset with discouraged hearts He came as the Stranger of Galilee, the Companion of the Road, who talked with them...

....He did not always come back in the same way. But come

back He did.

We must understand the significance of this lesson. We who love Him, we who long for Him, He will come to us, and He will come to us in the way that we need Him most--always as a Saviour, but the Saviour in different forms....
...in our grief, burdens too heavy to bear, He is the Consoler--"I, too, knew sorrow....I, too, knew rejection"

...when we are prone to walk away from Him, when we are tempted to go away from the Jerusalem of our heart, He comes as the Abiding Presence, the Eternal Companion, Pilgrim of the Road...and when He finds us, He talks to us about our broken hopes and kindles once more a flame in our souls
...and let me tell you this: that if you're ever tempted, once you've known Him, to turn your back and to head toward Hell, He'll come to you and He'll prick your conscience, He'll disturb you, He will agitate you, and He Himself will serve as a stumbling-block on your road to Hell...once you've ever known Him.

Who are they who constitute the exclusive company to whom He comes?

Who are they who know the benefit of His limited appearance?

I'll tell you who they are. They are the ones who have never completely closed the doors of their hearts to Him, despite all the pressure of this world and all the reason to look in another direction. Whenever there is anyone who keeps his heart's door even ajar the tiniest bit, Jesus Christ will come to Him...to those who earnestly believe, hoping against hope, so it would appear, He will come. This I most certainly believe. And when He comes, He comes without coercion, in no manner of spectacle, quietly, and always with reverence for you.

We've included now in the schedule of Saint Luke Church the Easter Eve Vigil. If you've ever attended one you know the mood and the temper of the service. It is planned deliberately to help us make the transition from the emptiness of the loneliness of a life without Christ to the glorious promise of the Resurrection

Morning.

We came last night in dimly-lighted Bieber Hall, and there in silence we looked at a rough, rude cross and contemplated the death of Jesus Christ. We moved from Bieber Hall into the Nave, and as we came into the Nave we heard read for us the History of the Passion of our Blessed Lord, the last chapter, that deals with His suffering and His death, and how they placed Him in the grave... ..and as part of the service we recite the Apostles' Creed, and after the decensus clause--"He descended into hell"....and we go on now, swinging in the other direction--"and on the third day He arose again from the dead" - - -

- - - at that precise moment the trumpets blare triumphantly,
everything that the organ can possibly give fills this room,
and every single light makes this place ablaze with glory!
...it's our symbolic interpretation of the resurrection...

.....but you know that that isn't the way Easter happened.

There were no trumpets on Easter morning.

There were no choirs on Easter morning, that first Easter Day.

That first Easter Day happened as a dialogue, a soul here and a soul there ...and always Jesus Christ. A woman with a terrible past, who having met Jesus Christ, couldn't possibly think of life without Christ, and clinging to that hope, the solitary weeping soul in the Resurrection Morning hears God in Christ call her by name - "Mary!" This is the Easter faith - - that's how it happens:

God: person-to-person.

Shudder at the thought that it could happen exclusively, exclusively only in the sense that it happens to those who look for Him, those who long for Him, those who can't think of life without Him. And if this should ever happen to you, then know full well, my friend, you are now numbered in the elect! For if

you belong to those whose hearts are afar for Jesus Christ, He will find you. That's why God planned Easter the way He did....that the Christ who couldn't be kept in the grave should find you in the dark night of your soul, and take you to the other side.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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*Common Fr
Easter day -*

"Precious Few"

(Acts 10: 40-41)

Before the reading of the text, permit me to tell you what the text says. It deals specifically with a glorious truth and a shocking fact. It makes reference to Jesus Christ—who came into the world, who suffered, died, having been crucified. But on the third day, the text makes perfectly plain, He arose, and then He revealed Himself. But notice very carefully how the text puts it—"but not to everyone..." "but only to a few..." It's the 10th chapter of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, a portion of the 39th, 40th and 41st verses:

"... And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; Not to all the people ... but to us ..."

The three-hour Good Friday service had been concluded. Shortly thereafter the preacher and I were walking across the upper parking lot, and I did as you know that I would do, I commended him on his preaching. With a modicum of modesty he replied, "One doesn't always do as well as one would like to do." ...and under my own breath I added, "...and one doesn't always do as well as one should..."

It's that sentiment that prevails upon my mind as I stand at the sacred desk to day and look back over 42-43-44-45 different Easters when I have preached an Easter sermon. I make a confession to you; when every single one of those sermons had been preached, I suffered a measure of frustration and failure—for I was dealing with the Central Truth of the Christian religion...and I could not do it justice.

This morning as I stand at the Sacred Desk I think I can tell you one reason at least why those Easter sermons never came off as well as I would like to have them come off, and certainly as well as they should have come off; I was awed by the responsibility of trying to explain to people what happened...I earnestly was trying to deal with things that they didn't understand.

Now let me say to you as quickly as I can, if you've come here this morning with wishful thinking that I'm going to explain everything to your satisfaction, you've come to the wrong place. Two years ago when I last stood at this place on an Easter Day, I made plain to you as earnestly as I could that Easter is not something that you explain...Easter is something that you experience, just as God ultimately

cannot be explained—like love—who can explain love? Love is something that you experience...

And if you think that I have come here this morning to try to help you with the things that you don't understand, I'm not so sure that I'm going to fulfill your expectation in that regard. But quite frankly I can say to you, I would like very much on this Easter Day, in as simple a manner as I can, to talk to you about some of the things that you can't possibly misunderstand.

Now having said all of that, let me tell you about John Huss of Bohemia. As to the authenticity of what you're about hear, I can't quite vouch. But I honestly believe that it could have happened the way I'm going to tell you, and the truth that it represents can't possibly be ignored or discredited...

...I once heard it said that when John Huss, declared a heretic, was to be burned at the stake, they donned him with all his ecclesiastical vestments and paraded him through the streets of Prague...and they laughed him to scorn...And then they came to a particular place where he was to be tied to the stake, for the sentence was: "Death by burning"...and at his feet they heaped his writings. And as they ignited the writings and the flames began to lap up around his feet, John Huss laughed into their faces—laughed at the folly of people who thought that they could destroy truth...

It may be a far cry from John Huss of Bohemia to the place you are seated—it may even be a farther cry from the place to that hill outside a city wall, and then close by the garden tomb where they placed the body of Jesus. And you and I may smile very broadly to ourselves when we remember how they came to Pontius Pilate and they said to him, "We'd like to keep him safe in the grave, that man Jesus—let us have your support." And Pontius Pilate agree and said, "You have some soldiers, you have a guard—go ahead! Seal the stone, secure the grave..." You and I may smile very broadly when we think of that.

...it was no small stone that had been rolled into position as a door for that grave. It took, as you might suppose, a bit of shoving and pushing. Presumably, the soldiers who were sent to seal the stone believed it was worth the effort. Of course! Inside, shut within a tomb, they finally had their man Jesus.

...go ahead, let me be as helpful as I can in this sermon...But, come now. Are many among us today much different from them? We, too, have a way of putting Jesus Christ in a safe place.

How about those who keep Him shut up within the pages of a book? Really they do, since about the only time they think of Him is when they reach for the Bible—or worse still as they glance casually, albeit respectfully, in its direction as it lies, no matter how dust-free, yet unopened on the table.

...a Christ shut up in a grave is little different from a Christ who is shut up within a closed book...

How about those who confine Him within ancient creed and dogma, keeping Him somewhat harmless in all those borrowed words that flow easily and thoughtlessly from their lips?

...you ought never forget Browning's Archbishop. Browning tells about the Archbishop who in a most sanctimonious tone, kneels before the altar, and with reverence and respect offers his intonation to the deity: "O Lord God Almighty"

...only to have the voice from Heaven reply, "Yes?"

They found the Archbishop dead. He didn't know how to handle a God that's suddenly come alive to meet his present need...

...you remember the ancient Greek myth of the statue that one day came alive, and they didn't know how to handle her...

Jesus, imprisoned in stained glass or carvings of wood—we can box Him there—but to let Him be made free!

How about those who close the door on Him once they've stopped by for an occasional visit within hallowed walls, quite content to leave Him behind as they saunter out into the world without Him?

Some of us went to South America on that special assignment a few years ago. We were told that in Peru, as an example, a scarcity of Roman Catholic priests—only two were ordained that year for the entire country...and then we found our way one day in an Andean village, where the priest, because of the scarcity of priests, came only once a year to bring the people the Sacrament. And it's been said that he made his visit and the service was over—God bless them—in their sentimental way the devout Andean peasant, leaving the church, would turn back and say, knowing full well that they wouldn't be back until another year—"Goodbye, Jesus!...Goodbye, Jesus!" And Jesus was kept within the walls of a place, no matter how holy, and perchance they went out into a world without Him. A Christ locked up in a church may be no more vital than a Christ who is shut up in a tomb.

But here's a happy thought: when I think of people such as you—and hear me, and hear me well—there are some, not many perhaps, who are a precious few for whom Jesus Christ is totally and completely alive. He appears to them in the here and how with all the freedom that becomes the wave of eternity. He has a way of showing up—and you know it—in the strange as well as the familiar. And how well you know this—He may not always come to us exactly on our terms, coming to us when, where and how we think He should. But show up He will—in one way or another. According to our schedule, He may come soon or late. Yet as far as He is concerned, He's always on time!

He is the Easter Christ—God alive!

Put it this way, if you prefer: He is God-in-the-Present-Tense. He comes to us where we are with His unfailing portion of pardon and peace. Consequently we are empowered, that's the right word for it, so that we may persevere with patience in order that the divine purpose for our lives may be fulfilled triumphantly. This I most certainly believe."

Summary

"...it was no small stone that had been rolled into position as a door for that grave. It took, as you might suppose, a bit of shoving and pushing. Presumably, the soldiers who were sent to seal the stone believed it was worth the effort. Of course! Inside, shut within a tomb, they finally had their man Jesus.

We smile somewhat to ourselves as we think of their stupidity: let Him be put where He belongs—keep Him there—let Him be walled off away from us.

But, come now. Are many among us today much different from them? We, too, have a way of putting Him in a safe place.

How about those who keep Him shut up within the pages of a book? Really they do, since about the only time they think of Him is when they reach for the Bible—or worse still as they glance casually, albeit respectfully, in its direction as it lies, no matter how dust-free, yet unopened on the table.

How about those who confine Him within ancient creed and dogma, keeping Him somewhat harmless in all those borrowed words that flow easily and thoughtlessly from their lips?

How about those who close the door on Him once they've stopped by for an occasional visit within hallowed walls, quite content to leave Him behind as they saunter out into the world without Him?

And while we are at it—how about those who have positioned Him in the remote Past? Maybe they will think of Him with reverence and respect but only as Someone, special as He may be, who lived long ago and half-a-world-away. In doing so, wittingly or unwittingly, he remains the One-who-was.

But here's a happy thought: there are some, not many perhaps, who are a precious few for whom Jesus is totally and completely alive. He appears to them in the here and now with all the freedom that becomes the waves of eternity. He has a way of showing up on the strange as well as the familiar. He may not always come to us exactly on our terms, coming to us when, where and how we think He should. But show up He will—in one way or another. According to our schedule, He may come soon or late. Yet as far as He is concerned, He's always on time!

He is the Easter Christ—God alive!
Put it this way, if you prefer: He is God-in-the-Present-Tense. He comes to us where we are with His unfailing portion of pardon and peace. Consequently we are empowered, that's the right word for it, so that we

may persevere with patience in order that the divine purpose for our lives may be fulfilled triumphantly. This I most certainly believe..."

*From "Precious Few," the sermon based on
Acts 10:40-41, by Raymond Shaheen.*

"VERDICTS OF ETERNITY"

There are four verses of Scripture that serve as the basis for today's sermon; it's from Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the third chapter, verses 1 through 4:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.
When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Paul, as you know, was a convert, and bless his soul, he never forgot that he was a convert. He always talked like a convert, he always thought like a convert, he always acted like a convert; and for a convert, you know, there are never any varying degrees, there's never anything between, it's always a clear-cut case for a convert - - it's black or it's white - - it's always clearly put.

The church can be eternally grateful to God that Paul was the convert that he was, and that in all of his sermons and in all of the letters that he wrote he wrote, he talked, he acted like a convert. It's clearly put in this text - - he had no patience with people who took the name of Jesus Christ if they did not behave the way Christians ought to behave, and if they could not remember all that Jesus Christ had done for them. You see, ever since that incident on the road to Damascus, when he had his moment of confrontation, when the total impact of God was brought to play against his life, he began reacting toward life, and he began reacting toward everything only as he could see it through the mind and the spirit of Jesus Christ.

He said such strange things.....

"From that moment on I began to live, yet not I.

but Christ is the one who lives in me."and we go on

quoting the Apostle Paul, even to this day. Now as he remembered the resurrection, this for him was the paramount thing in the life of Jesus Christ...

...not that He was born of the Virgin Mary--important as that might be to a Christian's faith

...not that Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified--necessary as that may be in the full development of the process of salvation

...the important thing for the Apostle Paul was that Jesus Christ is alive!

He is the Resurrected One!

...and everything that happened prior to the moment of resurrection was a necessary chapter which led and pointed straight to the Resurrection Garden.

It was Michelangelo, I presume, who was much of the spirit of the Apostle Paul when he became weary with people who kept always talking about the crucified Christ - - Christ having suffered and died, period. In that stormy, rebellious way that Michelangelo knew, he once came into (was it St. Peter's in Rome?)...and saw his fellow painters treating one gallery after another--and always the same theme - - - the sad, wan, emaciated Jesus Christ upon the cross...and with justifiable impatience he railed against them and said, "Why must you do this - - ?"

...ah, I wish I would have brought his direct words to the pulpit this morning! that you might have the full benefit of them...

I'll recall them as best I can.....

..."Why must you do this? Why must you always paint Jesus Christ as the crucified and stop at that point? Do you not remember the resurrection? - - that crucifixion at the most was only a few hours, and they passed. The last word about God is not the Cross! He lives and reigns triumphantly; He is the Risen One!"

Now, it's an important thing that we should talk about Jesus Christ,

crucified. And if I had my way, I would have gone over this whole Lenten season that we have just passed, re-written it, perhaps, as far as my preaching was concerned, and I would have driven home harder and harder the terrible price that He had to pay in order that our sins might be forgiven. There is no such thing as cheap grace...every time you treasure in your heart

"God has redeemed me"

"Jesus Christ forgives me my every sin"

...every time you take this tremendous thought to heart, remember--that Jesus Christ had to die, that those words should have meaning at all for you, and for me.

But you must never stop at the point of His crucifixion. Says the Apostle Paul, "He is the Risen One." It was the Risen Christ, the Eternal Pilgrim, the Abiding Companion on the road, with whom he had confrontation....and that's why in this letter he writes to Christians - - not to strangers, not to unbelievers, but to Christians - - he said

"If ye then be risen with Christ - - "

...Christ has risen - - now you ought to be risen in Him, too; that is, you ought to live in the power of one who has been resurrected---you ought to live as one who is sustained and strengthened by the power of life eternal....and if this is so, then as a Christian you should set your affection upon the things that are above. And furthermore, says the Apostle Paul, this Christ of the Resurrection Garden is going to come again, and when He comes again, we Christians are going to appear with Him in glory!

The verdict of eternity will always be in favor of the Christian, and when Christ returns again, the person who stands to benefit most will be the Christian.

Now, you're not taking this ^{easily}~~easy~~, are you?

You're not just listening casually to what's being said?

This is a tremendous truth!

...it isn't only that Christ is going to come again,
but stacked up alongside of it is that when He does
come again the person who believes in Christ stands
to benefit most, and that the verdict of eternity
will always be in favor of the believer!

...that's a tremendous thing to believe!

It's a daring thing to say, and tolerant, charitable as you may be, you may be inclined to take issue with it. You're too humble to permit yourself to believe that a Christian could have this advantage in the sight of God. You and I are not inclined to allow ourselves to become part of an exclusive company. We would much rather think that God belongs to everybody, which He does, and God's going to deal graciously with everybody...and it's a lot easier to believe that in the end God is going to save everybody - - because then, you see, we don't become smug, we don't become complacent.

You may be inclined to think this, my friend, and argue if you will with the Apostle Paul, but the great Apostle, talking now as a convert---you just can't faze him. For him, this is the way it was: Christ will come again, and when He comes again, the Christian's going to appear with Him in glory. That's a tremendous truth.

Now if that should happen, then, says the Apostle Paul, right now we ought to begin to live as though it's happening right now. Christians should be people who set their affections on the things that are eternal, the things that are above - -

...ah, and precisely at this point, the natural man rises up in each one of us and says, have done with this talk, preacher - - don't talk to me about the

world that's yet to come! I have more than I can handle with this present moment--the demands of today are far greater than I can bear! Don't ask me to set my affection upon the things that are above! It's all that I can do to gather up enough energy and wisdom and patience to deal with the cantankerous person who lives next door! or even to get along with people within my own family circle. Don't talk to me about tomorrow - - God knows I can hardly get through today!

...so we react. But this Apostle Paul, always speaking as the convert - -

- - we have no choice, says he. We are to set our affection upon the things that are above, upon the things that are eternal. We are to be heavenly-minded.

This, you know, was the original pet peeve of the Communist against the Christian cause. In certain countries of the world we Christians were so "heavenly-minded that we were no earthly good"....that's why they made their jibes about "Pie in the sky by-and-by, but what about bread now?"....and in more than one community on the face of the earth we Christians are the ones who talk about the world yet to come---Heaven belongs to us...but remain blind and insensitive to the pressing economic, social and political issues which cause great inhumanity.

Well, you can't take issue with the Apostle Paul at this point very long, because the Apostle Paul in this same chapter, in the very same breath by which he says Christians who think in terms of the resurrected Christ who set their affection upon things above....ah, he goes on in a few more verses that follow, and tells us how we ought to behave right now - - lays down a pattern for social behavior in this world. The Apostle Paul, gallant soul that he was, might have set

his affection upon things yet to come, but he also knew that he was walking along the weary way of earth. You can read those succeeding verses for yourself. They are quite earthly. And this pattern for social behavior that even the Apostle Paul lays down for us, is enough to keep any man with his eyes upon the heavens, but with a concern for his brother.

The Apostle Paul was able to think this way and to talk this way because for him paramount was the resurrection of Jesus Christ...the verdict of eternity is always in favor of the Christian. The message of these post-Easter Sundays is this: that man never has the last word; God always has the last word.

In one of the pre-Easter weeks we brought the members of the Monday Afternoon Choir School into the Nave for their weekly devotional service. They're here from 4:00 until 6:00 o'clock, and then for the last 15 or 20 minutes we share a devotional service here. We did something rather unusual that one day. Instead of having them come in formally and occupy seats in the Nave, we asked them to line up against this side, and then they faced this exposure. Nature cooperated beautifully. The sun was setting. The Nave was dimly lighted. The only illumination that we had were the soft rays that came in through the stained-glass windows; and because we were in the Lenten season we concentrated upon that fourth window from the end, and as you can see it now, it's the window that depicts the crucifixion....and while we were in the midst of Lent we talked about the agony and the suffering of Jesus Christ, and I said, as I was constrained to say to them....

...and suppose that should have been the last window in Saint Luke Church?

...suppose this is where my preaching would end:

And then they crucified Jesus Christ.....period.

...this would be the last sentence, so that now, you see, we would come on this post-Easter Sunday and we'd be dealing with nothing but a memory. We'd be talk-

ing about a good man, who lived a gracious life, who loved humanity...but then cruel people, evil personified, killed him...and God couldn't do anything about it!

But that isn't the last window in Saint Luke Church, for the simple reason that that isn't the last word in the Gospel. The Gospel that we proclaim, which echoes and re-echoes the verdict of eternity, marches straight beyond Calvary to the cool of the Resurrection morning...to travelers on the way to Emmaus, breaking bread, and Jesus Christ, the Resurrected One, with them....and then to the Mount of the Ascension, with the promise that He will come back, and when He comes back - - re-appears, we will be there with Him! This is the Gospel of God. This is the verdict of eternity! It's an exceedingly precious thought....God has the last word....good will remain triumphant! ...life is stronger than death! ...love is greater than hate!

Said the Apostle Paul, now because this is true, you Christians live in the power of the Resurrected Christ - - you Christians live each day against the backdrop of eternity. That's why tomorrow morning, when I am tempted to sin, when I am tempted to succumb to the pressures and the demands of the present moment, the Holy Spirit will bring me up short, and for want of a better way of putting it, I will say it to you this way: remember, there's always tomorrow, and that tomorrow is in the hand of God, and God remains the final Judge, and the verdict of eternity is always to be reckoned with.

What power this gave to the early Christians! That's why they dragged them through the streets....that's why they took them and cast them before the lions.... ..that's why, when they dipped their bodies in oil and ignited them, made them burn as torches in the garden of the Emperor, they sang---they sang the songs of the redeemed! Nero could have today, but God has Eternity....

...and they honestly believed that the verdict of Eternity
would always be in favor of the Christian.

* * *

"THE WRATH OF GOD"

The sermon today bears the title, "The Wrath of God" and the text is from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, the 6th verse:

"For which things' sake the wrath of God
cometh on the children of disobedience."

I can't tell you how great the number may be, but this I can tell you: that there are many people who when they think of God, try to keep Him at a safe and a very comfortable distance, their attitude toward Him is either one of being disinterested or being detached. It isn't that they are atheistic and it isn't that they are agnostic - - they are perfectly willing to agree that there is a God, that God does exist, that God may be in charge of things - - this they do not question; but as far as they're concerned, they're perfectly willing to let the matter rest at that point. Nothing more to be said. They keep Him at safe distance - - their attitude is one that permits them to be detached or disinterested in God.

Now I think there are understandable reasons for this, not that I'm about to condone it; I am trying to explain it.

There are some people, in the first place, who when they think of God, can't quite understand Him, and because of their nature or their temperament, they're not much for anything that they can't quite understand. They may have, if you please, a so-called scientific mind, they want to be able to figure anything and everything out, and they have ways by which to get their data, and then they draw their own conclusions.....

...now God, you see, just can't always be figured out. You can't tie Him up in neat little packages, you can't always imprison

Him in formula and say this is it....and what is more, what you may understand of God today may not be the understanding that you'll have of God tomorrow - - not, perchance, that God may change, but we change, and we have a way of holding God responsible because we happen to change in our moods and in our thoughts.....

...well, this is one reason, perhaps, why some people keep God at a safe distance - - they're afraid to admit that He doesn't exist--for some unexplainable reason they have to admit that He's there.....but they just can't quite figure Him out to their satisfaction, so from that moment on they appear to be disinterested or detached.

There's another reason why some people are perfectly willing to:

"You go your way, God; let me go my way"

....they've never really had a need for God. Now some of us can't quite understand how any person could ever become like that! ...for this is the thing that has brought many of us to God--there is none to whom we could turn except God, and we were driven to our knees and there was only one word that we could cry

"God!

"God!

"God! - - "

...strange as it may seem to us, there are some people who never seem to have gotten to that place. Life has gone along very well, without a crisis, and apparently they are made adequate, with this resource or that resource, to meet the demands of life placed against them. And because this happens to be their own particular situation, they don't have too much interest in God. Again, they're detached, almost disinterested - - they get along very well without Him.

Now there's a third reason, I think, why people fall into this category; they may fall into it, but they remain there by choice. And the choice is this: they want to keep God at a safe distance -- they are afraid to get to know Him.we're like that, you know. Some of us, wittingly or unwittingly, create a barrier between ourselves and other people because we just don't want to get involved. We'd rather have our picture of them and what they are. This is one reason why we go our merry way with our prejudices. If we really got to know some people we'd learn to like them, and sometimes it's a lot easier for us not to learn to like them. Even as we are, we treat God in the same way -- at a safe distance. We really don't want to know Him completely. We'd much rather write our own little ticket, have our own little image of God, and not let God change it. For this is the risk that we always run, for God is the God who does reveal Himself....God is the God who is always trying to tell us exactly what He is like...

...and some of us are afraid to find out what God is like --
the whole God, the perfect picture of God.

That was part of the trouble that the Apostle Paul had with the early Christians. Wherever he went, this was part of his assignment--trying to tell people what this God of the Lord Jesus Christ is really like, because they were always writing their own little formula concerning God, they were always framing God in their own little picture of Him--and one of their favorite things was to say, why He's a God of love....God loves me...

...He's a good God...He'll always take care of me!
...and they were quite content with a God like that--a God of love.

But, says the Apostle Paul on more than one occasion, do you really know what that love is like?--this love of God which gave Jesus Christ for the salva-

tion of your sins is also a love that can be stern and demanding and severe! You don't know it, says the Apostle Paul, but He can be a God of wrath! Now do you understand what I have been trying to say? We would much rather, far rather, treasure Him as a God of love

...a God who smiles, a God who never frowns

...a God whose hand is always outstretched, saving,

"What can I do for you this morning? Come,
walk with me merrily along the way of life!
There shall no evil befall thee!"

...but, says the Apostle Paul, there is also a time when that hand is outstretched, not, so it would seem, to give you a blessing, but a hand that is outstretched to take you to task! There are times when God looks upon you, and you can't possibly find the trace of a smile upon His face...there are times when God will look upon you and He will be angry.

I'll grant you, this is not popular preaching. And I'll grant you that this is part of the curse of contemporary Christendom....

...we've made God too friendly

...we've made Him our pal and elder brother

...we've made Him, as we did right after World War Two, using
the title of a popular book, "God, My Co-Pilot"

...you can't ever treat yourself as an equal with God. To treat God as an equal, to fraternize with Him on that basis is to bring Him down to your level, and when you bring people down to your level you can push them around.....and God isn't to be pushed around just because He happens to be a God of holy love and He is righteous.

Because He is a God of holy love and because He is righteous, there are times when He can become so very, very demanding, and He can exact from us certain standards, and when we fail to live up because we are downright disobedient.....

...let me say that again--

because we are downright disobedient

....it's one thing for God to have Jesus Christ say, "Father,
forgive them, for they don't know what they do"

...but the sins that frighten me most are the sins that
I commit when I know exactly what I am doing, and I
am a child of disobedience

...and when I disobey Him, I can't allow myself the luxury,
I can't allow myself the liberty, I can't allow myself
the license of permitting myself to think that God in
my disobedience will wink at me and turn His back and
not behold me in my disobedience.

Where do I get this line of thought?

It's as Christian as it comes. This is the line of thought given to us by the
Apostle Paul. You remember last Sunday we talked about Christ coming back again,
Christ appearing in glory, and holding before us the blessed prospect that when
Christ comes back again we who take His name, we who love Him -- we'll appear
in glory, too.

Then the Apostle Paul began to shake his finger, and to the very same
people to whom he held out this blessed hope he said,

"In the meantime, mortify therefore your members which
are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate
affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, that is
idolatry...

get rid of them!
...for the wrath of God comes upon the children of
disobedience."

Sure, God loves me.

Sure, God's coming back in Christ to claim me forever--this I fervently believe.

But in the meantime, says the Apostle Paul, watch out how you behave...watch what

you think...watch what you say....watch what you do

...for in the meantime if you should continue to be a disobedient child, when God comes again, He'll come and visit His wrath upon you.

And then, of all things, the Apostle Paul tells those Colossians, those Christians, that they've got to keep themselves personally pure---and that word mortify means kill....get rid of

...get rid of these personal pleasures you allow yourself, the sins of the flesh, sexual desire - -

..it cannot stand before God - - get rid of it, he says.

You have no idea, my friends, how important this was that Paul should say this when He was talking about the wrath of God, for if you think that we live in evil days now, when the church was young there were those who went to worship their pagan gods, they went to their pagan temples, and even directly associated with the pagan temple were the prostitutes; and whatever they received was used to build the pagan temples. Now against that kind of background a man was meant to be a Christian! ...and against a society that said it's perfectly all right for a man to do anything that he pleases, with anyone that he pleases, anywhereand then God comes along and raises up a preacher by the name of Paul, and Paul says to people who took the name of Jesus Christ....

"Well God expects certain things from you no matter what the standards of surrounding peoples may be...God expects you to be obedient, and if you're not obedient, wrath will come upon you."

Let me say to you what I said earlier:

I can understand how I can ask God to forgive me for the sins that I do in my ignorance....

I can understand how God can deal ever so graciously with me when in the blind-

ness of my youth, in the folly of my immaturity, I can go astray....

....but when I know what is right, and I've been brought face to face with a God who can be severe and demanding, and I deliberately go my way and disobey Him....

I have no right to expect God, even though I take the name of Jesus Christ, to wink His eye at me and say,
"I did not take note of it."

To the day I die I want to preach to all men everywhere that God is a God of love, that His arms are outstretched to receive the penitent sinner...

...but I must also declare that this is no cheap love

...this is holy love

....this is righteous love

...this is love that can hate iniquity

...this is love that can exact punishment upon those who think they can flaunt the grace of God.

Now, believe it or not, my friend, this is one reason why some people are afraid to get to know God any better - - they are afraid to have to reckon with a God who can be a God of wrath. But that's exactly the kind of God He is when we continue in our disobedience.

Beloved, we don't have to go to Hell.

Beloved, God wants always to smile upon us, God wants always to help us and to redeem us.

But that love would have no meaning if it meant that God could never be angry with us. He happens to be the kind of God that He is. I dare you to get to know Him better....and when you do, you'll never be able to praise and thank Him enough, not only for the smile of His favor, but for the hand raised in judgment....for even this is part of your salvation.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - "The Wrath of God"

"The gravest disservice that any man can do to a fellow-man is to make him think lightly of sin. Any teaching which belittles the horror and the terror of sin is poisonous teaching. Paul besought his converts not to be led away and deceived with those empty words which took the terror and the sting from the idea of sin."

"If there be no wrath....there is no love; if there were no love, there would be no wrath. It is more blessed and hopeful for sinful men to believe in a God who is angry with the wicked, whom yet He loves every day, and who cannot look upon sin, than in one who does not love righteousness enough to hate iniquity."

"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"

The second Sunday in May is being increasingly observed as the Festival of the Christian Home. That's why the sermon today bears the title, "The Christian Home"; and the text, a familiar verse from the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth and was obedient unto them."

We seem always to have somewhere the daring reckless artist in our midst. They have no desire to continue in conventional patterns. There was the daring young artist who when he was assigned a commission to picture Jesus Christ, painted Him with Negroid features---a daring, reckless thing to do. There was also the artist when he was commissioned to paint the picture of Jesus Christ, remembered the people in the Far East, and when he portrayed Jesus Christ, He has the features of the Japanese, the Chinese...so great was the Oriental influence.

Not too many years ago a sister denomination had decided to update their religious literature; they had been of the opinion that it was high time that they make their Christian education material as attractive and as appealing as possible to the young generation. And so when it came to the text that dealt with teen-agers they tried to word it and to phrase it so that it would have an appeal for those who are emerging as young adults. The artist assigned to the particular task of making Jesus Christ relevant to our day, painted Him wearing Bermuda shorts.

I'm not here this morning to plead the cause of the daring young artist, but I am here to say to you that unless Christ is made contemporary, unless Christ is made relevant, He can have no meaning for us at all. We are not fair with Him and we do Him a dis-service if we keep Him forever imprisoned in the

past. If when you think of Jesus Christ you think of Him only as the boy in Nazareth who lived two thousand years ago, you are not fair and you are not honest. For Jesus Christ is alive, and He lives forevermore. That's one reason why Mr. Granner deliberately has chosen for the hymn for this month--that hymn, incidentally, which we sang as a middle hymn today--a hymn that continues the Easter theme: Jesus Christ is not dead....Jesus Christ is not a figure in the past; Easter says He is alive--alive forevermore - - that means He is alive right now.

If Jesus Christ is to be made relevant, if He is to be made contemporary, then I plead with you that we make Him relevant and contemporary as He was at the very beginning--that we start at the point at which He began and the point at which God made Him relevant and contemporary...and that is within the family circle. I am here this morning to encourage you to invite Jesus Christ to be a part of your family circle now... that your home might be Christian.

This text, incidentally, is an interesting one, for it introduces us to the original, or if you please, the prototype of the Christian home. Jesus had been in Jerusalem. He was the teen-age Christ, and after the custom of those days He went up there with His parents...they had observed the feast. As the impressionable teen-ager He had become aware of the world around Him, the deepening of sensitivity was now apparent, and when He was up there in the big city (may I put it for you this way?)...He was absolutely fascinated by the learned people with whom He could associate, the illustrious group who invited Him into its company...and how He talked with them, and a whole new world began to open up, and He asked them questions---and He answered theirs - - they were amazed! We're always amazed when anything begins to emerge; and this is the impressionable teen-age Christ emerging as the young adult.

But the feast is over. The journey to Nazareth must begin. His parents

discover that He is not among them, and so they go looking for Him and they find Him and they take Him to task, but the understanding is that He has to go back to Nazareth....

...how can Nazareth ever again be the same, once He
had been to Jerusalem: - - once He had talked
to the learned doctors:

...Nazareth meant a small town

...Nazareth meant a carpenter's shop - - the routine,
monotonous, humdrum life of a village...

....but He went back.

And I say this to you now with complete candor: it was not an easy thing for Mary and Joseph to be the parents of the teen-age Christ...for the simple reason that it's not an easy thing to be the parents of any teen-ager. For the teen-ager is the emerging adult - - it's life at the keenest and the sharpest of all growing edges. And I am reasonably certain that when He came back to Nazareth He had His moments when He was so certain that His parents did not understand Him. And this is not easy. It's never easy for any parent to feel that their children do not understand them. But the Scripture says He went back to Nazareth and He was obedient to them.

But I think I can say this to you....that all the time He was in Nazareth, and all the time this eager, curious mind of His was at work, and every now and then when He felt that His parents didn't understand Him, I don't think that they ever gave Him to feel for a single moment that they did not love Him. And this is essential. We parents may have to admit that there are times when we do not understand our children, but God have mercy upon us if there should ever be any moment in their lives when, overwhelmed by the lack of rapport between us, that they should ever question our love. For you see, this is the priceless thing that remains.

It's one thing to be misunderstood, it's another thing not to have the assurance that you're being loved. One ought not to shy away too much from the fact that he could be misunderstood. This whole business of not understanding one another is not limited to the teen-ager and the adult. The man who works for his superior - - he, too, has his moments when he is not so sure that the superior understands him.....we who are married - - we men frequently admit *freely* that we have our moments when we're quite certain that our wives don't understand us, and they're always telling us how they feel the same way in their relationship toward us. This whole business of running the risk of being misunderstood is not something that's limited to the teen-ager.....

....so Jesus went back to Nazareth, to Mary and to Joseph. That's the way God planned it. For when God saw fit to give the most important single thing that He could to the world, the precious life of Jesus Christ, He chose Mary and He chose Joseph, that within the confines of the family circle the Child should grow up and be nurtured.

Every now and then you and I, when we see how we have to scatter our concerns, invest our lives in so many places and so many different people, and we realize the apparent futility of not being able to do solid-type work, we lament and we say, if only I could limit myself to just a handful of people, if only I could concentrate on three or four, and make my life count effectively among them - - how much better it would be!and then God looks down from Heaven upon us and smiles the broadest smile, and He said---

"Why, that's exactly what I had in mind all the time!

That's what I had in mind when I instituted the family circle! - - that within the limitation of a small group of people you should live and grow as you love."

It isn't necessary for me to tell you that the basic unit of society is the home. And when the home deteriorates, all of civilization suffers. I don't have to tell you this. But I may have to remind you that the home never becomes the effective instrument that God intends it to become until, if you please, it becomes a Christian home. It makes the fullest and perfect impact upon society when a home is Christian.

Now I ask the question: how does a home become a Christian home?

Well, how does an individual become a Christian?

...an individual never becomes Christian until he decides to become Christian.

So it is with the home--the decision has to be made.....

....may I tell you this parenthetically - - there are some of you who can appreciate this I am certain, for you have to reach a certain age until you can say this.....you look back nostalgically over the home in which you grew up; you recall the years of your impressionable childhood and adolescence; you picture faces; you hear voices; and then after a while you think of certain things that were in that home; and then some day you'll reach the age where you'll start reasoning like this: well if something should ever happen to Dad and Mother, and if the home should be broken up, I would want very much if I could take this one article from the home--for me it has certain significance and association...

....this is the way I feel about the home in which I grew up. I remember one article in particular--it's a picture. It's a picture of Jesus Christ standing at a door and knocking. I cherish it, not because it's good art--in fact, it's poor art, but I cherish it for what that picture means to me through my home, the home in which I grew up.

....I never remember my mother ever reading the Bible to me. I never remember my father ever reading the Bible to me. Immigrant that he was, he had difficulty learning the language; the only thing that he can write to this day are the two words that constitute his name. When it comes to reading--oh, the years have taught him that this word means this and this word means something else--he can spot-check them....my mother had very limited schooling--I think that's why she never read the Bible to us, because she was embarrassed to read it to us who were getting an education...

...but while she never read the Bible to us, I do remember occasionally when we had moments of crisis in the home of the immigrant, with the six mouths to feed during the depression years, and my father who traveled on the road, and always the uncertain element about his return.....every now and then she would gather us together, as a mother hen gathers her brood, and we would be there within the shadow of this picture hanging there on the wall--this represented for her and for us the presence of Jesus Christ in our home...and there we had our prayer...

...and that, incidentally, is what prayer is....being made aware of the presence of God, and for us Christians, through Jesus Christ.

....there's another reason why I cherish this picture. Our pastor came to visit us once, and he saw the picture. And as our preachers are wont to do, he began to interpret it. And this was the first time that it had ever dawned upon me, as he said "He's knocking at the door--He'd like to enter that house. But the only way He'll ever get on the

inside is when somebody on the inside opens the door. He'll never get in any other way. He will not go in unless the door is opened for Him".....

...it made its impression upon me....

And when I justify my existence as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, every now and then I say to myself that this is the burden that rests upon me, that I may offer some kind of motivation to people to open the door of their hearts to Jesus Christ.....there's a stranger at the door...let Him in...

...let Him in.

So I say to myself in the preparation of this sermon: what is a Christian home? It's a home in which Jesus Christ can be found. And as I recall this picture from the days of my childhood I now say - - and Jesus Christ gets in that home only by way of invitation--somebody has to decide that He is going to be made welcome.

I've lived long enough and I've come to understand human nature well enough to know that there are varying degrees of spiritual sensitivity within the family circle....varying degrees between the father and the mother...varying degrees between the children and their parents. Not all who constitute the family circle are spiritually sensitive alike. I know that when I go visiting, and yours could be the same experience---what a delight it is when you near the gate or when you get to the door, and everybody that constitutes the family circle comes running, running to welcome you, to make you feel at home. This would be the ideal, of course it would be, as related to Jesus Christ---if everyone within the family circle would welcome Him. But it doesn't always work that way.

I do know that some people are made welcome into a home because one member of the family circle makes it his business to make that person feel at home. May-

be that's the way it has to be with you and Jesus Christ. Maybe you will be the person, the only person in your family circle, who may invite Jesus Christ in. If that should be necessary, that you should be the only one, let me encourage you to let Him in, for He has a way of graciously making His influence felt. Just let Him in, if only one out of five...one out of six...one out of two.... one out of three, should let him in.

Jerome K. Jerome, the play-wright, wrote an interesting thing one time called "Third Floor Back", the story of an apartment building. And a stranger came one time looking for a place to live, and this was the only apartment vacant. The people who lived in the apartment building were not the most desirable of people, but he needed a place to stay. They did not know him, only as the man "third floor, back"....but as he walked in the corridor, as he engaged in seemingly idle conversation at the door, over a period of time their lives became transformed...the precious impact of the stranger who was decent and honorable and good. With the passing of the weeks and the months the evil that heretofore had attracted them lost its appeal. Only one door was open to them now--the door into a more decent, cleaner, into a purer....the stranger who happened to come and live under the same roof.

There is no substitute for the Christian home. And a home is made Christian only when Jesus Christ can be found in it. And He'll be found there only when someone lets Him in.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AS GOD'S CHOSEN ONES"

Today's sermon is another in the series being preached this year in Saint Luke Church from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The sermon today bears the title "As God's Chosen Ones" and the text is from the 3rd chapter, and it's a portion of the 12th verse:

"Put on therefore, as the chosen of God,
holy and beloved - - "

In the preparation of any sermon it could be very helpful to the preacher if when he is meditating he can bring into clear focus the people who might be in the congregation - - if he could divide the people into two groups, and one group might be those who have come spiritually sensitive, athirst with great hunger for God's precious truth, the people who know they cannot live except that they are sustained by the Word of God...the responsive ones

...and then on

the other hand it would be equally helpful to the preacher if in the preparation of his sermon he could bring into clear focus anyone who might be in the congregation who isn't so sure about what the preacher is going to say--for the moment, perhaps, he might classify himself as something of an agnostic...he doesn't know exactly what he believes and he is inclined immediately to reject certain things that might be offered to him. By your leave, let me deal now with this second-named person who might be here, the person who is not so sure that he is in a responsive mood to what the preacher might say.

I think I can understand his frame of mind immediately when he heard the reading of these words "as God's chosen ones"...for I tell you quite frankly, if I were numbered with those outside the church, if I were to be included with those who have yet to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, I'm not so sure that I would accept at face value these words "God's chosen ones", for there's

something mighty exclusive about these words. For you see, I have been drawn to Christianity--I'm still on the outside (I'm speaking as the unbeliever)...I have been drawn a bit towards Christianity because I was led to believe that God is a good God, that God is the greatest God, that God loves everybody.....
...and now the preacher stands at the desk and he reads a passage of Scripture that uses this figure of speech "God's chosen ones" - - tell me now, what kind of a God are you offering me who seems to show favoritism? ---that passes by some people and only to certain people does He say, "You only have I chosen--you're mine" - - ?

If I were not a believer, I think I'd give the preacher a mighty tough time with this particular figure of speech, because when I was preparing this sermon it was not easy for me to accept at face value what these words say!....
...because I, too, have wrestled with them, and I, too, remember that when I read the pages of the Old Testament from the first book to the last, the figure of speech is written in almost every page---all thirty-nine books constitute the story of God's dealing with His chosen people! Of all the people on the face of the earth, God did say to the Hebrews "You're mine!"...and He entered into, what do we call it? - a covenant, a bargaining contract, in which He said things to them that He never said to anybody else, in which He offered them a kind of protection which He did not guarantee to other people, He offered them revelation which was not made plain to any other people. And then when I come to the New Testament, I find a new adaptation of the same old theme, for when you read the pages of the New Testament you come face to face with the Christian Church, and you come face to face with Jesus Christ calling certain people to be His disciples, naming them Apostles, and designating the fact that they, of all other people, have been chosen and commissioned to go out.

You know, don't you, that the very word 'church' comes from a word whose

root meaning means ('called out' - that's what the ecclesia is, the 'called out'. So you see, I have not come to this sacred desk this morning easily or lightly. I have come as one who has wrestled with these words and what they might mean and what they might not mean to one on the outside, to say nothing of the way some of us cherish the very thought of them---"as God's chosen ones".....

....God - - showing favoritism? God - - passing by certain people in order to choose you.....for if He chose you, it means there are others that He might not have chosen.

Well, maybe we're making too much of it, for it's a basic law of life that this principle of selection remains. Turn any page in history and there's always the element of selection, there is always the designation of one group as over against another group. Go into industry, go into business, go into any strata of society, and you always have your gradations, your distinctions. Sometimes we refer to the fact that this man's in that group - - "he got the breaks"....

...he happened to be at the right time with the right thing in the right place; when the curtains on the stage were drawn, separated, pulled apart, he was the one, the only one on the stage, and all eyes were focused upon him....and he made the most of the moment which was his! There's always this element of selection in all of life.

Now, tell me, does it happen because someone arbitrarily chooses and makes the selection and rules out all others---can it be as automatic as that? I hesitate to use the figure of speech, but there are groups in Saint Luke Church...I use the word advisedly. Let me explain it more. On Wednesday of this week the staff of Saint Luke Church will separate themselves from Saint Luke, we'll go off somewhere by ourselves, we'll spend the greater part of an entire day earnestly planning and preparing what we refer to as the program for next Fall and Winter. We do not take this responsibility lightly. We will wrestle with this

program, each staff member particularly responsible for his own department, with whatever recommendations that may come from the Pastor. Then come September, and for each week thereafter, for the ten following months, SAINT LUKE MESSENGER goes merrily on its way, into your homes, and each issue constitutes, if you may permit the figure of speech, an invitation, a challenge, to participatewhen the story is written at the end of the year, we divide the congregation, wittingly or unwittingly, into two groups.....those who respond, and those who do not respond. It is a fact of life!

Now because this is true - -

...and one understands that even within the office where he works -

...a school teacher understands it with her pupils...a wise school teacher said to a group of teachers to whom he was giving instruction: "You can count yourself successful as a teacher if in the course of the year you find in your class one or two responsive pupils--if you can inculcate in them some desire to accept what you offer"

...now because we read this as a fact of life, it ought not now to be difficult to accept the fact that God has His groups too, or should I say the groups that belong to God?

So we go back and we begin at this point: The Scripture is perfectly clear when it says "God so loved the world - - "

...God does love everyone, and

God's grace is freely offered to every one of us

.....but when the story is written about those who are numbered in the Company, the chosen ones, if you please, in reality they can be called the chosen ones

because they had chosen to respond! This, then, you see, is the qualifying factor on our part. God's love shed freely upon the world, but only certain people respond, therefore they themselves qualify for this selection.

Now I'll never be able to explain it to your satisfaction any more than I can explain it to my satisfaction, why there are certain people who seem to respond in a certain way, while others do not respond. Seemingly they have the same qualifications - - God has given to every one of us a soul, a mind, a heart...but not each of us responds to the same degree. What He offers is constant...we vary in our response. I am convinced in my own thinking that of necessity this is the way it ought to be - - that there are some things that can be best done only by those who choose to respond and to be numbered in God's elect, for there are some things that can be best done only by those who are the spiritually sensitive and the willing ones.

The success of this church may lie in the fact that, thanks be to the Holy Spirit! there are those of you who ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to respond. The success of your own spiritual growth and development lies in the fact that when God calls you ask God to help you to respond. It is the basic teaching of our church that no man is capable of responding fully, of and by himself, save as he asks God to help him. And this is part of the wonder and the glory of it all - - God not only beckons to us, but God has a way, through the Holy Spirit, of entering into your heart and helping you to respond! I would say to those who are here now, in the impressionable years of their lives, our young people in particular, to recognize the solemn truth that God, right now, is offering them over, ever so much, and right now, in the impressionable years of their lives, is the time to respond, that they might in this moment take advantage of what God offers. This I most certainly believe.

Now there is one final word to be said in connection with this sermon.

When a person finds himself in the company of God, among the chosen ones, there are certain things offered to him there that are not offered elsewhere, and this, too, ought to be easily understood; for wasn't it Wordsworth who said, "God has a few to whom He whispers in the ear"?....and if anyone wants to hear what's being whispered he has to be close enough to hear the whisper. There are some things that God does not shout, there are some things that God says only quietly, and only the man who allows himself to be still and to walk in the company of those who are closest to God gains the full advantage of what rightfully belongs to those who are described as the "chosen ones."

I said of necessity it seems to be this way, as the rule of life. I want to share with you something that's absolutely legendary--there's no scriptural foundation for it....

....our Lord was about to finish His ministry here on earth.

It was near the time of the ascension. Someone met Him along the way, and the conversation was like this:

"O Master, Galilean, you have accomplished a great deal in your three years. No one has ever done as much as you have done in the three years of your ministry. You have given people a fresh glimpse of God. We have reason to believe that you've brought God into their lives. Rumor has it that you are about to wind up your ministry. What are your plans? What gives from this moment on, once you leave?"

....the Master and the Saviour of men quickly replied--

"What are my plans? - - Matthew - Andrew - Bartholomew -
Simon Peter - Thomas - James - John - - "

...He named them. And who were they? Shall I

use the figure of speech? - - - "the chosen ones" - - the people who had decided to respond - -

....and then the interrogator says:

"This your only plan? Suppose they fail?"

...and Jesus is supposed to have answered -

"I have no other plans. If I can't depend upon the
chosen, the ones who respond, I can't depend
upon anybody else."

....isn't this the reason why you and I are in the company? He's depending especially on us, and as we respond to Him daily, this is the surest of all reasons why some day you may be entitled to a halo.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

("As God's Chosen Ones")

Prayer

THIS, O GOD, is the time of our responding to Thee. We have been confronted by Thy Word and Thy Truth. We are the recipients of Thy Grace and of Thy Favor. The week has come and the week has gone. With complete honesty before Thee we can say we have not lacked any good thing. What we have needed most Thou hast graciously and freely supplied.

NOW as we enter another week give us hearts that respond with true gratitude for the love of our friends, for the material blessings of this world, for the opportunities that come to us each new day, for the fellowship that we can claim through this church.

MAY THY HOLY SPIRIT, O GOD, rule and control our minds and our hearts that we may appreciate to the full all that Thou art and especially in the chiefest of all blessings, the gift of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

NOW, HEAVENLY FATHER, the hour here will soon be over. Other things will claim us, the burdens of our daily life, the pleasures that invite us and which we will enjoy, the opportunity to walk familiar places, and always, so it would seem, some chance to be more loving, more kind and gracious. Help us to make the most of these, O God, ere the time pass.

NOW FORGIVE each of us his sin and keep before each of us the hope of Heaven, and watch by all whom we love, wherever they may be.

OUR FATHER.....

"THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC"

The sermon bears the title, "The Christian Ethic" and that portion of the Scriptural setting for the sermon which serves as a specific text for the sermon is a portion of the 22nd verse of the 3rd chapter of Paul's Letter to the Colossians:

" - - but in singleness of heart, fearing God - "

It goes without saying, of course it does, that the one critical, unmet need in life today lies in the realm of human relationship. We are a people who have been able to do exceedingly wonderful things in the world of science, in the world of technology. For those of us who can recall at least three decades, we are absolutely amazed with the kind of thing that has happened in the last two decades in particular. One has only to sit back and observe, thanks to modern communication, the kind of thing that can happen when a man is orbited into outer space....he has almost to pinch himself to observe this to say - - can this be true? - - is this in the day in which I live? - - -
....so great is the wonder and the marvel of scientific technological advance!

But when it comes to the realm of human relationships we seem to lag sadly. Why is it that for most of us we have yet to master the fine and wonderful art of living together, and knowing how to treat our neighbor, to knowing how to treat any other single human being, whether he is a part of my own family circle or whether he's the man under whom I work, or whether it's the neighbor next door or someone three thousand miles away. The grim reminder which is Hiroshima is simply this: that unless we learn to live together we shall surely die! God made us to live, and to love, and if we cannot love while we live, we shall perish in death.

I am inclined to think that men and women through the ages have turned to the Bible for at least two reasons, and each reason, I submit to you now, equally important. The one reason could be put this way - -

- - that men have wondered what God is like, and so it is the Bible, more than any other recorded page, which has revealed to them the mystery of God....it is the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ....it is Jesus Christ who shows us what God is like. And then man, with his religious sensitivity, has wondered how he can live with God.

Well, in order to live with someone you must know what that person is like....and so the Bible tells us the basic nature and character of God and the standards by which God expects us to live with Him. Think of it for a moment! You and I are finite creatures - - God is infinite, God is divine! - - we are human. How is it possible to live on the basis that pleases God? how is it possible to live with God? - - because some day we shall appear before him.well, it's the Bible that tells us what God is like and how we can live with Him -

- - and this is one reason why some people keep coming back to the Bible.

But oddly enough, I'm willing to believe that there's another reason why people read the Bible, and perhaps, I hesitate to say it, it may be for this reason more so than the first:

- - they have come to appreciate the Bible (and I say it advisedly, now) as a code of ethics; for the Bible now, more than any other book, reveals to us the face of man.... and thanks be to Jesus Christ, who has redeemed sinful nature, the Bible tells us the nature and the

character of man....and the Bible, the New Testament in particular, lays down for us the ways by which we should live with one another, the ways by which we should love one another if we are to live fully. The Apostle Paul, writing to a group of Christians, speaks very specifically in this way....he lays down for them the Christian ethic. And when he does that, the golden cord that permeates all of his thought is this: that each of us should look upon any other person as a human being, as a child of God, and never, never less than a human being.

It's amazing what culture and society, and even what age, can do to us in blinding us to the basic fact that man, any man, regardless of his condition or class, should be seen as anything less than a human being. The tragedy of our age is that we suffer from blindness, blindness where people are involved - -

...parents are blind to the growing needs of their children

...children are blind to the affection and the discipline of their
parents

...capital and labor are blind to what each has a right to claim

...nations are blind to what each other has a right, nations are
blind to the obligations which they are expected to fulfill
in behalf of the common family of man which is humanity...

...we are blind....the Belgian, the

poet, Maeterlinck has done something for us when he once wrote a play called "The Sightless" - - a very interesting play. It has twelve characters, and nothing much seems to happen in the play. The twelve characters, each one is blind, and they are found in a forest. Throughout the entire play all that they do is talk to each other. Someone asks the question, somebody answers. And then

to prove the point that the poet had in mind, he has the oldest one of the blind men say this:

"All we do is talk to each other.

We are blind.

We have never really seen each other!"

...it's the poet's preaching, but this is the parable applicable to many of us. We live with each other, we have relationships with each other, but basically we fail to see each other.

One of the most pathetic moments that I ever spent as the Pastor of this church was when I went to minister to a family, a family of five. There was strife, there was dis-harmony, and as I sat with them there was made perfectly plain to me - - all the signals were there....that one member of that family was starving for love, that one member of that family was crying out for four other people to just give him the ghost of a chance, to recognize his weakness, and at the same time to be charitable. And without any hesitation I submit to you now that I walked away from that home with tears in my heart because of the blindness of four people for another member of their very own family circle. My prayer has been that the blindness might be removed, that those who live so closely with that person might be able to see, as a human being, with all of his weaknesses, yet despite it all, with his desire to be understood and to be dealt with patiently, because only as he would be dealt with patiently could there be any hope.

I come now to this passage of Paul's - - he's talking about dealing with people, getting along with one another, and he concerns himself with three different groupings. In any one of these groupings you and I rightfully belong:

- the one grouping is the relationship between husbands and wives

- the second grouping (and by the way, you can read this for yourself, the closing verses of the third chapter)
 - ...the second grouping is the relationship between parents and children
- and the third grouping is the relationship between the master and the servant - - or whatever terminology you want to apply in this 20th century

And as I read what Paul has to say, I'm tremendously impressed by the fact that Paul says each one of these has rights, and these rights ought to be respected. Paul is laying down, fundamentally, the basic concept of human nature: every single person has rights that ought to be respected.

But Paul mentioned something else that sometimes we forget: that every single human being has certain obligations, as well as his rights. And this could be the tragedy of our day. Please do not misunderstand me - - when a man talks about rights, he should also talk about obligations. The two belong together. The one can have no meaning without the other.

Well in this whole matter of husbands and wives.....

..before the Christian era did you know that a man treated his wife as so much property, and a man had all kinds of rights. If after two or three years of married life he wanted to become footloose and fancy-free he was perfectly free to do it! and the wife as so much property remained and stayed. He could do whatever he wished

....then comes along this thing called Christianity that gets into a man's mind and into his heart and claims his soul and changed all of this. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the woman who is the wife, said: "You are to be

subject to your husband - yes! - but you are to be subject to him as those of us who love the Lord are subject to the Lord....you are to please him - yes! - but you are to please him in the Lord. And whatever relationship you have for him, or each of you toward each other, it must be as something that's done in God's name."

And then Paul turns to the relationship between children and parents....

...there was also a time before the Christian era where a parent could do anything that he wished with a child - - he could sell him into slavery, and this strangest of all things - - if a father wished, he could order his own flesh and blood, his own child, to be killed! - so great was the power he had over his own children!

11..the Apostle Paul, imbued with Christianity, comes along and he said: "Parents should discipline their children - this is right! - and children should obey their parents" a word that sounds strangely new to some of us, that there are some things that ought to be done by a child simply because the parent wishes it is a philosophy that falls upon deaf ears all too often - -

...but by the same token the Apostle Paul says that there are obligations that rest upon the parent to encourage the child, not simply to take him to task, but to encourage and to speak favorably and to win the day with kindness and patience.

When it comes to the relationship between the foreman and the laborer, the master and the servant, Paul says something that's absolutely tremendous.....

....let any man, once he becomes a Christian, remember
that he is a slave to Jesus Christ - - that he has
one master--God is his master!

Now what is the Christian ethic?

The Christian ethic is simply this:

In every aspect of human relationship God is the
primary factor

- - how, in the sight of God, dare I -

should I - ought I -

treat this human being?

...my wife...my child...my friend...my neighbor...

....any other human being _____?

The basis of the Christian ethic is this:

- - how, in the name of God, should I treat
that person?

...and once a man has come to know Jesus Christ, he has a ready-made answer,
and may God have mercy upon us if we don't know what that answer is!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH"

On this day of Pentecost the sermon bears the title "The Holy Christian Church"; and as the text, from Paul's letter to Timothy, in fact the first letter that he wrote to Timothy, it's the third chapter and the 15th verse:

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Paul was always enthusiastic when he talked about the church, and it's a long cry from what Paul had to say about the church to what people in our day are saying about the church. The church has come upon hard times. It is not always praised. In fact, ever too frequently it is criticized and sorely rebuked. Even from within our own ranks, in this our own generation, we're raising a crop of angry young men who, whenever they have opportunity, take pot-shots at the church, ridicule it and make light of it. Whether you are aware of it or not, I cannot say, but there are those people, responsible people, who say to us, and they say it from within our ranks, that we now live in the "post-Christian era"...and when they make a statement like that they simply imply that the church, as an institution, has outlived its usefulness, that whatever glory the church has had is something that belongs to the past and is not typical of the present moment. I don't know how long I'll keep it in my library, but I do have a book entitled, "What's Wrong With The Church" - - and this ardent man, young in years, has felt the burden so greatly that he has written a book, every single chapter of which takes the church to task, except some kind word that comes in at the end.

It's a refreshing thing to read this expression on the part of the Apostle Paul. He was enthusiastic about the church, and God knows why, for the church in his day was vastly different than the church in our day. I don't think they owned

a single piece of property, I don't think they could name, in the day of the Apostle Paul, twenty-five fully ordained ministers of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!they were completely dependent upon volunteers, and they were completely dependent upon people who would say "You can meet in our house to-night--it's our turn to have the church service" ...and if they couldn't find a house in which to meet, because of the pressure of persecution they went down into the catacombs and they met secretly, under cover of darkness, and in places not easily traced. The church in the day of the Apostle Paul had its share, also, of men who criticized it, and every now and then they had to publicly announce, whenever they had a church service, that Brother So-and-So defected--he was no longer to be included in the ranks of those who were being redeemed. Against a day like that, when the church was few in numbers and only had one hard day after another, it was the Apostle Paul who was singing its praise. We do well to listen to him, we do well to consider what he thought of the church.

As an example, he referred to the church as something that belongs to God. This we dare not forget. Whatever it is that claims your allegiance through Saint Luke Church, it must never be this institution, this organizational structure which is this congregation. We belong to God, and every now and then you've heard the reference to Saint Luke Church which is "that portion of the Family of God" - - - ...the Apostle Paul kept remembering this.....

the church belongs to God - - it's His

Now since this is true, there's a measure of comfort for each one of us. God will never allow His church to fail. We may. But God won't. And God Himself said through Jesus Christ that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. The Devil is still at work--he may give her a tough time, and it may also seem as though he would annihilate the church, but in the mind of God there is always to be the remnant, and the church is the only institution, it is the only

organization of which I know on the face of the earth today of which we can honestly say, if there is but a remnant, yet the remnant will be the seed by which the church will continue. This is to what you and I belong - - something as eternal as that!

The Apostle Paul says the church is a household of God--the Family of God. And who are they? We are the ones who have responded to God's love. You remember the basic word for church, in the original tongue - - ekklesia - - the called, the chosen...the ones who have chosen to respond to God, to His gracious invitation. You may not know very many people who are here this morning--this is true. For any single one among you there is a limited number of people that you can name who are members of this congregation...

- what with four different services on a Sunday
- what with being scattered all over Montgomery, Prince George's County and the District of Columbia

....this is readily understandable.

But there is one thing of which every single one of us can be certain, and that is that every other person who happens to be here is here precisely for the same reason that I am here: I have responded to God's love in Christ, and when I respond to God's love in Christ and claim Him as my Saviour, I naturally find myself in the company of other people who have done the same thing. And whatever else you may not know about anybody else, this one thing remains - - each of us is an object of God's love, and each of us has responded to God's love. Now this is what the Apostle Paul says the church is, and it's a healthy thing to keep remembering it - - we are this Family, in God, who have chosen to respond to Him.

Now, says the Apostle Paul, this Family in God, this household in God, is the pillar and the ground of truth. We do well to ask ourselves what these words mean. Paul is writing this letter from Ephesus, and while he has been in that

town he has been very conscious of the fact that in Ephesus there is one of the seven wonders of the world. It was the grand and glorious Temple to Diana--mark you, one of the seven wonders of the world. And one of the outstanding characteristics of that temple was its 127 different pillars, and each of the pillars that graced that temple was a gift from a certain king, each pillar was made of marble, and ever so often they were ornately studded with jewels and diamonds, precious gems...and like as not, atop each one of the pillars was either a name or a caricature of a particular person, prominently displayed, so that as you drew near the temple one of the first things that you might see was the person whose name appeared atop the pillar or some figure which represented him.....

...thinking of this, the Apostle Paul says, this is what the church is - - it's the pillar of truth - - it displays truth to the world.

The church is the only institution that I know that keeps constantly reminding people of the truth of God and the truth of man. That's why Paul could be enthusiastic about it, the only thing that he knew that kept displaying to the world, kept showing to the world, kept impressing upon the world the truth which is God, and the truth about men.

Then he said - - "It is the ground of truth"and when he used that figure of speech he was using the Greek for it which means a buttress, and the buttress was the support of the temple. So, for us, the thing that supports and sustains us is the truth of God. And what is the truth of God?

...that God made us

...that God loves us

...and that God holds us responsible for what we do, and
for what we become, and the way we treat each other

And what is the truth of God?

...that God who holds Himself as one who will take us into account

is also one who makes Himself available to us to help us.

Paul doesn't mention it, but there is one other thing that I would add to what he thinks the church is: it is the only place that I know, thinking now as a location - - it's the only place that I know where men can come together in order to worship and to draw benefit from their fellowship. The church is the only institution given primarily to the worship of God and to His work.

Now on this day of Pentecost I would remind you that this is what the church is.....

it's something that belongs to God
and we belong to it because we belong to God
and through it we worship Him and know His truth
and we are on display before the whole world.

The world has a right to expect more from us than it does from any other single group of people.....and unfortunately, the world judges the church not so much by the nature and character of God Himself as the world judges the church by the nature and the character of those of us who claim membership in it. What the world needs now more than anything else is what only the church can offer. May you and I be made equal to so great an obligation!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD IS LOVE"

The sermon bears the title, "God Is Love" and it is based upon the Epistle lesson for the day. The text is the 16th verse of the 4th chapter of First John:

"So we know and so we believe the love of God.
God is love; and he who abides in love abides
in God and God abides in him."

Christians have always been people who have believed the most amazing things, the most amazing things about God. There are many people who don't even believe that God exists. Christians believe that He does. And when they believe in God, they don't believe in someone who is far removed, they don't believe in someone who is just a source of divine power, the Eternal Spirit, the creative genius of the world. Christians believe the amazing thing that God who exists is their Heavenly Father, a Father who watches over them, a Father who provides for their every need, a Father who loves them. You have only to traffic with people who are non-Christian in order to appreciate the full benefit of this concept. There are many, many people who do not believe that God exists, and of many of them who do believe that God exists, they cannot give themselves to accept the fact that God cares for them at all. Christians have always believed the most amazing things about God....not only that He exists, but that He is a God of love.

And one of the strangest things also is that they believe these things about God in the most difficult of times and places. It's not my purpose for the moment to take you back some two thousand years when these words were first written. I want to talk for the moment about contemporary Christians who believe these things, in most difficult situations....

...it was only this past week I heard that my colleague was a patient in the hospital. So I went, and I walked that fourth floor corridor, only

to find when I entered that the bed was vacant. But his wife was there. She said, "He's still in surgery, but I feel optimistic." Because I had gone there to minister to him as well as to her, I could not leave without a prayer, even though the bed was empty. And we had our prayer---much the same kind of prayer that I've had with some of you when I have visited you in your time of pain or affliction - -

"O God, Thy blessing upon this Thy servant.
Use doctors, nurses, technicians, that Thy
healing touch may come. Bend us according
to Thy purpose, suit us according to Thy
holy will - - "

...that was the substance of it. And then as I was about to leave, I simply said to her, "God is good. Have no fear."
Within two hours, after I had gotten back, the telephone rang. The report was not good. It's two months, three months---who knows?
And in one flash life now takes on a new dimension. This thing called reality has newer meaning.

...As soon as possible, within a day or two, I went back to the same hospital room. This time the patient was there, and his wife. Could I still say what I had said two days earlier? - - "God is good."
Could the three of us who are claimed by His love, the two of us who have given ourselves completely to full-time Christian vocation, believe it then? We gave expression to that very fact:

God is....and God is still a God of love

Christians believe the most amazing things about God! in the most difficult times, in the most trying of situations!

...I never knew him. I wish that I had had the privilege of knowing him and that's why I respect some of you as highly as I do who were fortunate enough to work with him, the second pastor of this congregation, who came here to minister to a struggling flock of people whose past was just a recent period of time, whose future was still quite uncertain. He shepherded a people who met in borrowed places, but he kept alive in their hearts that one day they could have a House all their very own. So Raymond Sorrick was your Pastor.

And there are those of you in this congregation right now who could speak far better at this point than I. He dreamed of these very walls. He helped fashion; they tell me, this very lovely rose window above the altar. And what is more, he kept alive in the hearts of the growing congregation that this thing could come to pass.....but then he, too, was stricken with cancer, and was never given the chance to stand where I stand nor my predecessor before me - - never to pronounce the benediction from this altar - -

Christians believe the most amazing things about God - - that God is love - - in the most trying of all times!

...I hope I will always have it where I can refer to it...

They were a precious family in this congregation. They were here when I first came. And then, because he was in the service, they were transferred out of here - - a good father, a good mother, a precious little brood. One night he takes the plane. Within hours the plane crashes.

...her letter to me reads, "We can't understand it. For us it was as though we were now reaching for the stars. We had everything!

And now he's gone."

Christians believe the most amazing things about God!

...to believe that God is love - ?

in the most difficult and trying times.

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick used to tell the boys preparing for the ministry at Union Seminary in New York that when they prepared their sermons they should always remember that behind every face, behind every person to whom they would preach, there would be a burden on the heart, and there would be a problem in their life, something vexatious. There are those of you this morning who have come to trust me enough, and as I discharge my shepherding role in your behalf, to know how burdensome the things are that you carry around in your hearts; and yet I can honestly say to you that I have never come back to this pulpit, after you and I have talked, with any desire to alter in any way my basic concept of God....that He is love, and that you can still trust Him, that you can still believe. For some of you, your world seems to be shattered and things to which you wanted to cling tenaciously have slipped from your grasp, and your hopes and your dreams, for some of you, have gone with the wind; but I hope that you understand that even as you have exposed me to these things, the like of which I myself may not know, yet I cannot come back to this desk and say anything other than this: that God is, and He is still a God of love.

There are those who say, but it's easy to have believed that this was true when Christ was here on earth. When Jesus was here He was the personification of God's grace and God's love, yea! We say in our Creed - " - Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father- - " ...ah, it would have been easy to believe something like that if I had lived when Jesus was here!

But then, as the poet said,

"Now He is dead!
Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down - - "

...it might have been easy to believe that God is love when Jesus personified it, and when people who were privileged to know Him walked into His presence and had to put their finger to their lips and reverently whisper the name GOD - - they had never seen anything like it! But now - two thousand years! ...and with that burden that you know that you have that perhaps you haven't told me or anyone else. Can a man still believe that God is love?

This I would say to you, that if you were to take this away from your heart, everything would be gone. The wonderful thing about God is that He is love. And the exceedingly precious thing is that He is willing to take the risk that love involves!

Love calculates on disappointment.

Love always involves sacrifice!

Or to put it once more - - love always means involvement.....dealing with people not as they ought to be but as they happen to be now.

Love always means running the risk of being hurt, trampled upon.

...and there are those who say, if you believe that love is so precious a thing, then ought it not to be guarded? ...ought it not to be shared only with those who will return it? Love was never meant to be wasted. Isn't it the worst possible thing to share love on those who don't deserve it?

This I say to you, the worst possible thing is for a man to hoard his love, and to keep it is the most despicable thing that can ever happen to a human soul.

But how do you know that God is love today? There are those who take us Christians to task because they say, this is arrogance on your part, this is pre-

sumption - - to say that you know that God is love. How do you know anything except as you experience it?

Dare we say it that way?

...there are those among us who never knew what love was until we
found someone who embodied love

...there are some of us who never knew what truth was until we
found a person who was truthful

...there are some of us who never knew what beauty was until we
found exquisite grace in a human heart

How do you know that God is love? The writer of these words says God's love can abide in us. This is how some of us know that God is love - - because we've encountered Jesus Christ in the hearts and souls of people who have shared God's love with us. I count myself unusually fortunate--I speak only for myself...for in these four decades that God has given me I have met people, and because I have met them I could never, never disbelieve the fact of God and His true nature,... for they have brought Jesus Christ into my heart.

We used to ask ourselves the question, didn't we: how can I know if God is real to me? how can I know that God exists?

...ah, Martin Luther answered the question for us splendidly.

Martin Luther said, "Herein shall we know that the love of God dwells in us, if we love our brother and if I take upon myself the need of my brother."

I believe earnestly that the one thing that the world lacks more than anything else is love. And I believe with all my heart that God gave Christ to us because God is always ministering to our needs and the thing that we lack. The world is hungry for love, the world is hungry for God, and the world is waiting for you and me to reflect it and to share it, and I hesitate to say it--I don't want to be misunderstood....but you could be the only person between belief and

disbelief on the part of somebody else where God is concerned.

Augustine, greatest, perhaps, of the early church fathers, for years lived a terrible, wicked life, but he was struggling. And then one time there came the conversion. I think the Holy Spirit used two people in the conversion of Augustine. One, his mother Monica, who prayed and prayed and prayed and never gave up praying for the conversion of her son. And the second was a teacher that Augustine had....
...and Augustine in his CONFESSION refers to that teacher as an instrument in God's hand, not because of the things that he taught, but the way the man happened to treat him as a person.

So we know and so we believe the love that God has for us....."God is love, and he who abides in God abides in love and God abides in him"

"I know not where his islands lift their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
beyond His love and care
One fixed thing my spirit claims:
I know that God is good."

...when a man can say this, he has the only thing that can outlast time itself.
As the Pastor and the guardian of your souls, I pray it for you as well as for myself.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen

June 16, 1963

How can we leave this place, O God, without desiring from Thee a parting benediction, an assurance that Thy continuing mercies will go with us, and always there will be within reach the Abiding Companion, the Eternal Pilgrim, the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

O GOD, we thank Thee for those who have come this day to this place, earnestly desiring from Thee that portion of truth which may hold them in good stead; we thank Thee already for the way Thou hast spoken to the deep needs of the souls of these, Thy people, as they have heard Thy Word read, as they have waited in the presence of others, in the very shadow of this altar, in thoughts that they would not express to anyone else, yet have they not been thoughts of dependence upon Thee? the pleading for mercy and for strength? the courage to believe? the willingness to love?

HEAVENLY FATHER, we thank Thee for this place, for what it has come to mean to us, where children have been baptized, where those in the impressionable years of their age have been confirmed in the Christian Faith, where we have received the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, where the vows between a man and a maid can be exchanged, and love can be given its halo.

O GOD, accept these gifts that we've brought to this altar; and what is more, accept the re-dedication of our lives. Watch over all whom we love, wherever they may be.

Our Father.....

"THE CHRISTIAN AND THE OUTSIDER"

This is the next-to-the-last in the series of sermons based this year on passages from Paul's letter to the Colossians; and the sermon bears the title, "The Christian and the Outsider", the text from the 4th chapter, the 5th and the 6th verses:

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without,
redeeming the time.
Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned
with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to
answer every man."

I'm not quite sure in my own mind what really is the most important part in a letter. There are times when I'm inclined to think that the beginning, the greeting, the salutation, is the most important part, because that sets the tone for the whole letter, and maybe the introductory statement makes one want to read on, and therefore has rightful importance.

And then, of course, one naturally thinks about the body of the letter, where the substance is to be found.

But what about the conclusion? There are times when I think this is the most important part, for this is the part that the person may remember longer. This is the part where a person can recapitulate, and if there's been any ambiguity beforehand, this is where he may attempt to clarify it. This is where he might clinch his arguments, this is where he might give the assurance most necessary - in the concluding part of his letter. Whatever you may say, don't ever sell short the concluding part of any letter.

At least, that's the way I feel when I come now toward the end of the letter that Paul wrote the Colossian Christians. And I'm remembering particularly how he began his letter and why he wrote the letter in the first place at all.

A messenger had come to him in prison and said that things were not as they ought to be among the Christians in Colossae. In fact, the Christian cause was being threatened from the outside. So Paul wrote this gem of a letter, a letter which in my judgment is one of the most precious of all the letters that he ever wrote. And I think I can tell you why.

It's in this letter, you see, that he stresses the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. It's this letter, you see, that has that magnificent statement that in Christ all the fulness of the God-head was pleased to dwell - -

- that's Paul's way of saying that Jesus is God!

and this must be the heart of the Christian message,

that Jesus is God - - God is Jesus

and to see Christ as anything less than God is to

fail to see Him as He is

In the course of this letter he gives them some good advice.

Always against the background, you see, that these were people where the cause of Jesus Christ was being threatened from without. Now after he said everything that he wants to say, he's about to bring his letter to an ending. Among other things, he said, "Pray for me"...and then he gives them some common advice as to themselves:

...they are to be aware of the fact that there are people on

the outside and they are to walk with those people in wisdom

...and they are also to redeem the time - - using every opportunity

at their disposal to minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now honestly, what does this really imply? It implies, doesn't it, that if you and I are inclined to think that all the trouble is on the outside, we'd better take a long look at ourselves and recognize the responsibility that may

that the one verse in the Bible which is the Gospel in a sentence does not read:

"God so loved me that He gave His only begotten Son
that as I believe I might have eternal life"

.....it doesn't read that way

Nor does it read this way:

"God so loved the church that the church alone would be the
object of His love - - "

How does it read?

..."God so loved the world - - "

...all of us are the object of God's love.

..He means every single one of us.

We who seem to be the recipients of His grace in a special way recognize the fact that God loves the outsider too - - the person who has yet to claim the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ.

Now when Paul asks the individual to focus his attention on the person on the outside, he at once takes every single Christian ()
He at once makes every single one of us a person ()

that he perhaps more than any other person ()
and every single one of us () with equal rights and equal obligations. According to Paul's understanding, every single person who takes the name of Jesus Christ should consider himself a ()

In the community in which I lived before I came to Silver Spring I had a colleague for whom I had high regard. He had been there longer than any of the other Lutheran pastors. He had become fairly well established in the community. He looked upon all people as his friends, and this is a grand and a good thing

to say about anyone. My friend knew a measure of delight in fishing and hunting. He belonged to () Fishing and Hunting Club.

There was always one associate with whom he seemed to fish, to scale the mountain(?). He was not a member of his parish. For some fifteen years they fished and hunted together. Then one day my friend the pastor was called upon to conduct the funeral service for this man. The day after the funeral service was conducted I happened to be attending a meeting with him. He laid bare his soul.()

"I am guilt-stricken", he said. "For fifteen years we fished and hunted together, and I never once talked to him about Jesus Christ.....I never once talked to him about the estate of his soul....."

.....now a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who can make an admission like that!

Don't misunderstand me---I have little patience with people who are always button-holing somebody else and saying, "Brother, are you saved?"

(

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Says the Apostle Paul: "Deal wisely with these people on the outside.....
.....redeem the time.....take advantage of every opportunity!"

(

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Back in February I had the good fortune to conduct a retreat for ministers in up-state New York. I made a bargain with a member of this congregation (

). It was winter and I didn't particularly care to drive. He thought he'd like to make the trip into those parts. He did. As we drove we talked about (

). Every mile, mile after mile, the prospect he was sure he would find. When we stopped at gas station after gas station, how he seized upon every opportunity to represent his interest. When we came back he didn't have too many orders, but I have reason to believe that he never missed a chance to deal with every person as a prospect.

In the sight of God, we who have come to know something of the love of Jesus Christ are to look upon every person as a soul for whom Jesus Christ died.

(

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.....all the opportunities that I have to minister to people on the outside (

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"A PRISONER'S FRIENDS"

Today's sermon bears the title, "A Prisoner's Friends"; and the text, it could well be any of the verses following the 7th verse of the 4th chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians:

"All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who
is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister - -
With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother - -
Aristarchus my fellowprisoner - - "

...and so he goes on and he names several others.

The older I become the less enthusiasm I have for depicting saints in stained glass windows. It seems to me that as soon as we put them in such a situation something unreal at once sets in. We remove them from the mid-stream of history itself.

I can readily understand what the ardent admirer of the late Pope John 23rd had in mind when he said, at the time of his passing: "The thing that I deplore most about his death now is that the plaster-of-paris boys take over"...meaning, of course, that now the statues will be made, now the images will be set up. You see, there was something about Pope John that no plaster-of-paris cast could ever breathe, could ever indicate. He was every inch a man, and a very, very human sort of a person....so much so, whether you know it or not, in one of the last conferences and interviews that he had with some newspaper men, as though he were anticipating the time of his death, he said that if the world should remember him, he would hope that they would remember him simply as Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli (?) - - a man.

Now who said these words? They called him the Pope. He was recognized as Christ's Vicar here on earth. He was recognized in the hearts of all devout Roman

Catholics, if you please, as God's #1 man here on earth! -- even today the Pope in Rome will be crowned--they call it, you see, a coronation....people kneel in front of him...they kiss his hand....and even in St. Peter's today, in the great city of Rome, if you were to visit there, you will see the statue of St. Peter himself, and the toe of that statue is well worn because of the veneration of the faithful in all generations who have come and kissed the toe of this man who was Christ's Vicar here on earth. He now, Pope John 23rd, who has gone to Heaven, pleads with all mankind who gave him so great respect, **yes** even among their quarters so great veneration, that when they think of him he would be pleased if they would remember the peasant boy, Angelo Guiseppe Roncali, the man.

As much as we may cherish for ourselves the thought that there is angel's breath within us, there's always something salutary when you can think of a man as a man....and I suppose that's one reason why I said to you at the very beginning, I have less enthusiasm now than ever before, as much as I like stained glass windows, as much as I would always want them to be in any church that I might serve, appreciative as I am of their beauty and their color...yet perhaps some other design could be had. But when you take a man, and you imprison him in glass, you run the risk of his becoming unreal and you remove him from the mid-stream of eternity, and forget that he was a man.

Since last September I have been preaching to you from Paul's letter to the Colossians. It is one of the most theological of his writings; in fact, it's not easy for the general reader to appreciate what Paul said to the Colossians. But now that I am finished with it as far as this year's series of sermons is concerned, the image of Paul the man, remains, and I have met him anew as the man, and particularly so now as the letter comes to a close. From the 7th verse on, in his last chapter, he does nothing but talk about people. This is how human

he was.

And after it's all said and done, you and I may give our lives to principles, but inevitably, in the final analysis, we concern ourselves with people. In the moment of death, thanks be to God if we can see somewhere on the horizon the face of a friend, even the face of Jesus Christ Himself. It was that way with our Blessed Lord.

...He had spent three years as the itinerant preacher....

...He had done the miracles...He had proclaimed God's love..

...He had sacrificed Himself

...and there on Calvary's brow--how do we find Him? - - grateful to His Heavenly Father that there in the moment of His death He could find within reach a circle of friends....He could look upon faces....He could hear voices - - and gather a measure of comfort and courage to His own soul.

So I look upon Paul, the man, the theologian, the church administrator, the great evangelist---no one has made the dent upon the Christian world as the Apostle Paul has. And when he brings the letter to a close, what does he talk about? He talks about a small circle of friends, and he could well afford to do it. For Paul, mark you, was a very controversial figure. You see, we've named the churches after him, we've named a whole system of theology after him, we've called him God's #1 man, where the universal Gospel is concerned. This is what we've done and said about Paul. But when Paul was here on earth he was the most controversial figure in the Christian Church.

He was not always appreciated....and even now in Rome, the city that he longed to visit, he was not received in a friendly way. The time that he spent in Rome he spent in prison. You can read for yourself the record in Paul's own writing, where he was always getting into trouble, he was always making new enemies. He accounts how they left him half dead on more than one occasion, how they had to

devise a method whereby they could put him in a basket and get him over a wall, that he might escape---so great was the hostility. He was the controversial figure...he was the fighter for the cause...he was the maker of new enemies, wherever he went.

He was a Jew, as you well know, but the Jews despised him. He became a convert to the Christian cause, and many Christians who had espoused the cause long before Paul looked upon him with fear and suspicion...."How can we trust you, a turncoat?"

....small wonder, then, he who spent so many years in jail could end this letter as he ends other letters, talking about his circle of friends---a man who brought comfort and courage to them.

Now the surprising thing about this is that when you read this list of names to yourself---at least six of them, in this closing section of Paul's letter to the Colossians, they are for you names and only names.

Prove the point?

.....what do you know about Epaphras?

...name me one thing about Aristarchus

....oh, with Onesimus you might do a little bit better---you

do know something about Onesimus, the runaway slave...but

that's about all you know

...then there was a man by the name of Justus

...and a man by the name of Demas

.....names, you see, and little more

than names --

...yet they constituted a circle of friends---friends of the prisoner.

It's not an easy thing to become friends with a prisoner. I once knew a man who had committed murder. After he was sentenced to the Eastern State Peni-

tentiary in Philadelphia he wrote me a letter and asked me to come and visit him. It was in the beginning years of my ministry, and I had never so much as ever shaken the hand of a murderer. I, go to visit him? But I did. And in the course of the conversation that we had the thing that he talked about practically all of the time was this: not that he was guilty or not guilty...but he talked about an old man in my home town who at great risk, at great financial risk, became the only witness in his behalf - - old Doc Miller, the town pharmacist, didn't know anything that he could say against the man, and he was willing to go to court and offer as over against that a kind of favorable testimony.....friend of the prisoner. It is not an easy thing to become friend of the prisoner.

Invariably when you become friend of the prisoner you identify yourself with the man himself, and what is more, you also identify yourself with his cause, directly or indirectly. The burden of this sermon is a very simple message.....
...many of us---99% of us, may never be able to make our mark upon history. We'll never become the chapter head of the text....we'll never conduct a great concert
....we'll never make the great speeches, where tomorrow is fashioned. God does give to everyone the privilege and the responsibility, perhaps, of lifting up the arms of those who are in key positions and especially when they have to sacrifice themselves and come upon hard times to do it.

I don't suppose very many of you have read it, and it could be that some of you would keep it at long range. As for myself, I cannot. As for myself, I treasure it, I call it the classic of the last six months. It's a letter written by a man who was in jail.....a letter, if you please, from Birmingham jail....a letter written by Martin Luther King, a clergyman. He could not stand on the sidelines. He became a prisoner. Seven or eight fellow clergymen wrote him a letter, and they took him to task for what he was doing. It wasn't so much that they questioned his motives, as they questioned his strategy. With remarkable restraint he answered - - "I have never

"BEYOND CONDEMNATION"

The sermon bears the title, "Beyond Condemnation." The text is from the Gospel for the day, the 6th chapter of Luke, the 37th verse:

"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:
condemn not, and ye shall not be con-
demned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:"

This is one of those texts, when once the familiarity has been removed, prompts one to say, did Jesus really say that? The reference is specifically to the first part - - "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged - - " .

Come now, how can we honestly escape this whole business of judging? Constituted as we are, each day we find ourselves passing judgment upon some thing or person. We are by nature critical.

And the truth of the matter is that when our Blessed Lord came to earth there were times when He was always allowing the element of judgment to enter into a relationship. People and principles were always being evaluated by Him. And do we not keep Him forever in the role of the Judge, since the Apostles' Creed reminds us constantly---"that he will come again to judge - - " . Christianity becomes weak when we minimize the fact of judgment on the part of God Himself. What, then, does one make of a text like this?

Perhaps the answer lies in the implication of the two words that constitute the text itself. The words have been carefully chosen - - beyond condemnation.

Criticize and judge we must, but we must never stop at that point. For even Scripture reminds us that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

We are in duty bound in the first place to understand what are the factors that have created the situation--what are the forces which have caused the individual to become the type of person that he is. I recall from the days of my first parish how my predecessor on one occasion said to me--"My blood fairly boils when I see how she is criticized." Now my predecessor was a veritable patriarch, a most lovable character among men, and for almost fifty years had been the good shepherd of that flock. The person to whom he was referring had the misfortune of growing up on the wrong side of the tracks and she herself had said to him once, "It's not easy for me to be what I ought to be, for you yourself know so well where I grew up." My good predecessor and mentor never forgot what she had told him and to this very day I ask God to keep me sensitive to the truth that it's a lot harder for some people to be good than it is for others. And in any element of judgment this fact must never be ignored. I am not talking about the easy path of excusing oneself. That may be an entirely different matter.

The second element that must be wrestled with is the element of responding in love. It is easy to criticize, it is not always easy to correct. God's primary purpose is correcting, that is, redeeming, a situation--a person. So we must remember that when a thing or a person may not be to our liking, it is never enough to rebuke or to condemn. Rather, the Christian is in duty bound to respond in love. And what is it to love? To love is always to act for someone's good.

August 18, 1963

"DUTY TO GOD - - AND MAN"

From the Book of Judges, the 9th chapter, and the 7th verse:

" - - Listen to me, you men of Schechem,
that God may listen to you."

Now there's presumption for you--a man standing up, saying to a group of people, "You had better pay attention to me if you want God to pay attention to you." Does God really work that way? Does God allow another man to have a position in life such as that, that with almost arrogance and with so great presumption could say to any people---"If you don't hear my words, then you may rest assured that God won't give you the time of the day."

The longer I think the things of God, the more I try to school myself in His Good Book. I am inclined to believe that God doesn't always work directly, and God doesn't always work immediately. Every now and then, it seems, He has to devise a kind of scheme or plan, if you will, whereby after the due passing of time and the course of events have run their course, He may reveal Himself; or if on occasion He wants His truth to be acknowledged, He may have to use an intermediary, He may have to use an agent. It isn't because God's that way--it's because we are the way we are. For shame upon us, that we condition ourselves even against the voice of God!...and every now and then God has to prepare us, and use other people, until He gets us to that moment where, when His voice is heard, there's no mistaking it, to say nothing of the advantage that comes through preparation and a prior warning that may be desirable. It's not presumption, then, that this man should

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stand up and say, "You people listen to me, or God won't listen to you."
It's simply that God now uses a man as a mouthpiece, that having heard,
they might later on better hear the voice of God directly.

I know you haven't read the background for this text--it's not the
Old Testament Lesson for the day. But through the years I have been haunted
by the intent of this context, and as I return to this book I want to share
it with you. We ought never to allow these precious truths to be lost in
the pages of the Old Testament. Back there in its early history there was
a very interesting thing that happened....

....they had been wandering now, these people of Israel, for a
number of years. Now as they entered the Promised Land they
were a people divided...and someone said, "What we need is a
leader, what we need is a king, a king who could take all of
us and mold us together--one man to whom each of us, to whom
all of us, would give allegiance." How this happened, I can't
quite tell you, but it did. And so they began looking around,
as naturally they would, and so they thought in terms of the
only natural man to be their leader....and all eyes focused
upon a man by the name of Gideon, who through military prowess
had established a good name for himself. And they said,
"Gideon, you're the man. We want you to be king."

...but Gideon declined. He seemed to have had his reasons.
Whatever they were, we are told this one was paramount: he
could not give himself to believe that any man should be looked
upon as the leader of a people....he said that they ought to
have a theocracy - - Jehovah, God, should be the King--not any

human being.

...now, that's the reason that he gave, and he had each of his
(listen to this--now you can understand it, of course,
when you remember that these were the days when poly-
gamy was still practiced)

...having a number of wives, he had seventy sons. And he
called his sons together and he said, "I have been offered the
kinship of our people. I have declined." ...and then he
pulled rank upon them, which he could well afford to do, in
good Jewish pattern, respecting the wish of their father - -
...he said, "Every single one of you likewise will decline.
I will not become king - - none of my sons will become king."
So the seventy sons agreed.

....but Gideon also had an illegitimate son, who through the
years had developed a kind of inferiority complex, I presume.
This, now, was his moment. And so Abimelech (that was his name)
went round about the countryside and said, "My father had refused
to become king. He will not allow his sons to become king, but
I will be your king!"

....and then they picked it up - - "He is his father's son. He
is some mother's son. We'll make him our king." And to make
sure that he had no interference he became party to a plot whereby
every single one of the seventy sons of Gideon was killed,.....
except one - - Jotham miraculously escaped.

...Abimelech goes on with his plans for the coronation. The peo-
ple gather together---a grand and wonderful occasion! Now they

will have a king! And as they gather together at a strategic sits and he is about to be crowned king, lo and behold, there is a voice heard from across the valley--in clear stentorian tones--a man is shouting.....and they look up, and there, on the precipice of Mt. Gerizim, is Jotham, the one son of Gilead that escaped, and he shouts to the people, and he tells them a story. He has a point that must be made plain, and he chooses an illustration to deliver the word...and this is what he tells, he tells the story, a fable:

Once upon a time, says he, in the forest, the trees gathered together and said, we must have a leader, there must be a king among us. And they said to the olive tree, you be our king. And the olive tree said, I cannot be your king. I am too busy already in something that's worthwhile. My oil is needed. I cannot give up what I am now doing. They looked to the fig, they looked to the vine. Each allowed himself to believe that what he was doing was too important to give up for anything else. And Jotham said, The olive, the fig and the vine declined, and the only thing left was the bramble bush--useful only for burning, and they made it their king. But the bramble said, If I become your king, you must obey me, and even as a dictator if I should say, the mighty cedar of Lebanon shall be destroyed, and then the mighty cedar of Lebanon must be destroyed! That's

all that Jotham said, and he disappeared, never again to be seen, never again to be heard from.

It's a parable, the truth of which cannot be ignored. And what is the point of the parable? The Christian understanding of this parable is this: that no one, being given an opportunity to serve in behalf of the common good, has a right to decline. To the best of my knowledge, there is no public election being held next week or the next few weeks. This is the kind of sermon, I presume, that's heard from some pulpits just before election day. But I have been haunted so much by this truth that I'm constrained to share it with you this first Sunday as I return to this pulpit.

There was a time when the Christian church allowed itself to believe that it performed a useful function only as the people were gathered together, and they had the Bible in their hands, and they got on their knees..... they listened to a sermon and they prayed....and then they went home. That is no longer true.

The Christian church is in duty bound to become involved with the world. No man who is a Christian, given a chance to serve, has a right to decline, no matter how you may look at it. Whether it be to serve in politics, whether it be to be useful in your neighborhood, community, whether it is to accept membership on a committee in this congregation....no one who has the gift and the talent ought to decline.

Now, let us look at it for a moment in the realm of politics.... there are those who refuse to become involved in politics because they say it requires too much personal sacrifice. Well, personal sacrifice it does--- it means meetings, it means becoming informed, it means making up your mind

on an issue, it means standing up and being counted. That's what it means. And so there are those who say, "I haven't the time, and I shan't make the sacrifice."

There are those who say, "I shan't become involved in public life because it's a sordid business. I shan't run the risk of having my dirty linen washed in public." A sordid business it is! but it does involve the risk. And I suppose Reinhold Niebuhr was perfectly right when, years ago, in that book of his called "Moral Man in Immoral Society" he spelled out for us as clearly as anyone that the body politic has a standard of ethics lower than the standard of ethics of any one single person. And one runs the risk of becoming sullied and stained when he becomes involved where the law of the group, the order of the group, the code of the group -- "everybody does it" prevails.

There are those who hesitate to become involved because, they say, "I have a right to think of my own personal desires." I was just impressionable enough to be moved by King Edward VIII in his desire to say "No" to a nation for the woman, as he put it, he loved. And so the Prince of Wales gave up a throne for a woman. There was a man in England who spoke to the nation, and when he finished speaking there weren't many people who applauded him. He was the Archbishop of England, old Cosmo Lamb, and he said something like this: "We respect the good that our monarch has done, we are in his debt as our King. But no one has a right to allow his own personal desire for happiness to interfere with his duty which he owes the common lot."

It's hard to believe, it's not easy to take. I came on the tail-end of a television program the other day. I can't tell you what preceded it, I only know that as the program was being wrapped up someone said what all of us have heard before - - "and the trouble is a bad man like him gets elected by good people who either don't vote, or refuse to become involved."

Now how does one become involved? I haven't the slightest inclination ever to turn my back upon the Gospel ministry and to run for public office. Some ministers have done this--we have about four of them who are on the Hill, and a Lutheran minister almost became the Senator from Washington last year. I can't find it in my heart to do that, and I can't find it in my heart to always give my name to letterheads, or to march in groups, even though I might respect men of the cloth who become involved--I most certainly do.

But I'm inclined to feel most sympathetically toward a man whom I revered and respected in the early days of my ministry. He never knew that I existed, but I knew a great deal about him. He was the very able pastor of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore--Harris Kirk. And there are those who believe that he, perhaps as much as any single person in Baltimore, exerted great influence in that community. And how did he do it? He would seek out the man worthy to serve, and encourage them to serve. He would sit down quietly and in confidence with men in high office and encourage them to bring their Christian witness in the post that they served. This, basically, is the way a Christian does bring his witness---not using particularly a label, but allowing himself to become involved.

Do you know, and I think it's still true, there are two men of this congregation who each year go over to Annapolis and spend the whole day there, as interested, committed Christian people, making themselves known to the Delegation, getting what information they can upon pressing issues, offering a good constructive word. This is the Christian witness.

There was a man by the name of Jotham who, as God's mouthpiece said, "I want to tell you something - - "and he told them the parable of the trees. How different the history might have been! What a king Gideon would have made!

.....but then they settled for Abimelech....

....and the end of his tale is a very sad story.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

August 25, 1963

"RECOMMITMENT AND A CHALLENGE"

The text is from the Epistle for the Day; it's the 1st verse of the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you
the gospel which I preached unto you,
which also ye have received, and wherein
ye stand."

Every now and then any preacher ought to do the kind of thing that I'm about to do: he ought to unashamedly stand in the presence of his people and assess his own preaching. He ought to ask himself, in their presence - - - what have I been preaching to these people ever since I first came to the sacred desk that stands in their midst? You know this is the second Sunday now that I have been back in this pulpit since my four weeks' vacation period, and every now and then, busy as that vacation period was with other things, I would find an odd moment in which I would ask myself the question.....what have I been doing those Sundays back there in Saint Luke Church?....and when I return to that pulpit, what is the nature of the message that I will deliver?

Now I suppose each preacher for himself catalogs the kind of preacher that he thinks he is. Let me tell you unashamedly the kind of preacher that I would want to be.....

I would want you to consider me as a man who came to this sacred desk, not to talk about some popular issue....not to talk about, Sunday after Sunday, some current event.....not to talk always about some ism,

whatever its nature may be....not to come to this sacred desk Sunday after Sunday and echo the kind of thing which you might have read for yourself in any one of our leading publications, not simply to echo the point of view of any particular columnist that you might prefer or that I might prefer.....

But I should like to be considered the kind of preacher who, when he came to this desk, was in duty bound to declare, without hesitation, without reservation, the Biblical truth of God, permeated with a passion for the souls of men.....I should like to be recognized as a Bible preacher, and I think I can honestly say to you that I have never come to this desk since I have been your Pastor without rooting and grounding myself in the Scripture at hand, and all that I've tried to say to you in any one sermon was completely scriptural. This I would like to be - - recognized as a preacher of the Word, as a preacher of the Gospel.

Now, you see, it's at this point that perhaps I ought to go away from the desk right now and sit where you sit, and let any one of you stand, now, and preach the balance of the sermon; for what I'm about to do is this--- to tell you what I hope you will be able to say, because I'm going to assess what I've been trying to do in these almost eight years that I've been your Pastor; and what I think I've done and what you know in your hearts I've done I would hope would be the same story.

You see, I find myself now much as the Apostle Paul did. He might not have begun his letter to these Corinthians in the way that I'm preaching to you now....but at any rate, when he came to this 15th chapter he says:

"Moreover, brathran, I want to declare unto you the gospel which I preached - - I want you to know what it is that I've been talking about!" "If thara's ever been any doubt in anyone's mind as to what I think, or as to what's been laid upon my heart, let me set the record astraight now."

I suppose any one of us preachers says to himself occasionally.....
...."Suppose the last sermon that I preached was the last that my people would ever hear me preach - - how would they evaluate it?" Well now, that's what we're going to do right now. Not that this would be, I hope, under God, the last sermon that I would ever preach, that I should ever preach to you, this Gospel that I declare unto you.

Well first of all, in every sermon that I have been preaching to you I hope I have made perfectly plain to you the fact of God, the fact that God is, that He's a living God, that He exists.....that, even when the sermon's been over, and you've gone away from Saint Luke Church, and if on occasion you've done what you should have done--perhaps in your own mind said, "I'm not so sure that I understand what he was trying to say", or perhaps, as is your right, you could have gone away and you could have said to yourself, "I differ! There's another point of view! - and that, too, he should have said" - - this could have been, this might have been your reaction.....
.....but one reaction, I hope, every one of you has always had, and that is that when I came to this desk, that there should never be any doubt in your mind as to any doubt in my mind as to whether God exists.

I once had a long discussion with a man who is no longer a member of this congregation; but he took issue with my preaching. He wanted a different kind of preaching. And I said to him, "Well, I earnestly hope and pray

that whatever you hear me preach, and I happen to be the Pastor of the church at the present time, that you might say to yourself, 'As he stands in that desk he's sharing with me the recital of his experience with God!'"and this is always primary. If in the preaching of any sermon the voice of God is not heard in your heart, that sermon has been preached in vain. Well that's the first thing I hope my preaching has been - - a witness to the existence of God.....He exists.....He is.....now.

And the second thing I hope that you've caught from my preaching: not only that God exists, but God knows that you exist.....

...that God does not exist for himself, but God exists for us

...that God knows that you are you - - that God is aware of everything that so easily begets you

I hope there's never been any doubt in your mind that when I've preached you should know that God knows the sin that you committed last night, and that God also knows the sin that you're going to commit tomorrow! God knows all about you....God knows your noble intentions....God knows your terrible failures.....God knows the good that you would, you don't do....God knows the evil that you would not do, you do. God knows it!

I would hope that in my preaching there would be no question in your mind but what God, knowing all about this, loves you. God, in His every relationship with you, is a God of love. And God's love is so great that He identifies Himself with this world. He came in the form of His Son Jesus Christ and carried in His heart every sin that you commit...and one time on a lonely hill He died, just because He loves - - you, and me. I should hope that in my preaching that there's never been any doubt in

your mind about this - - that God loves you.

I would also hope in my preaching that it's been clearly understood that God doesn't love you alone. None of us has a right to say, God loves me.....period. The most precious verse in the Scripture, perhaps, for many people is this: "God so loves the world - - "

...and I hope that I have been able to raise warning signals for you in my preaching....that none of you has a private hold on God...that none of you has a right to build your own little shrine where you keep God to yourself and to yourself alone. This God who loves you happens to be the same God who loves everybody else - - - the good and the bad, the saint and the sinner, the Christian and the non-Christian.....and it's just because He loves them that He can love me.

I would hope that in my preaching every now and then you found an element of relatedness - - in which you felt in duty bound to do something about your life...and you earnestly, fervently hope that Monday might be better than Saturday.....an element of relatedness by which you took this God whom you say you love, so sanctimoniously within these walls and this divine worship---and you took this same God with you to the office, that you took this same God with you to the table where you eat with other members of your family. I hope there's never been any doubt in your mind about God belonging outside these walls.

Then there's this other thing that I hope you've caught in my preaching, this Gospel that I've declared unto you - - - that while God is a God of love, He is also a God of justice.....and I hope that I've warned you against the luxury of always picturing God with a kind smile upon His face. I hope

that somewhere in my preaching you've gotten a glimpse of a God who can be an angry God....that the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will send Jesus Christ to come again, to judge....and when God comes again to judge He will judge us on the basis of what we have done with the love that He has given us. God's going to hold me responsible for every bit of love that I've ever known in my heart that He's had for me, and He's going to tell me - - "I gave you that love, not for yourself, but that you might share it." God doesn't have two faces. He is constantly the God of love..but He could lose His smile. He can become angry, not because He despises me in my wickedness, but because He despises the wickedness to which I will turn when I shun His love.

This is the Gospel I have been preaching to you.

It isn't my Gospel. The Gospel is the Gospel---it's never any one man's Gospel. It's the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as it has been laid on my heart---laid on my heart for the edification of your soul.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you which I ^{The Gospel} preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand."

....and by which I say now, ever so prayerfully, using the words of the Apostle Paul - -

"by which also ye are saved."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

September 1, 1963

"OUR FATHER - - "

Men have always wondered what God is like. Never is their understanding nor their lack of understanding of the basic nature and character of God so clearly revealed as when they pray. Let me hear a man at prayer, and I'll tell you the kind of God in whom he believes. And furthermore, as I hear him pray, I will be able to give you some kind of picture of the man himself. For what we really are and what we honestly think of God is clearly revealed when we pray.

It was Dr. Paul Scherer, I think, who often wished that he had a kind of spiritual x-ray so that he could walk in and around his congregation immediately after he said "Let us pray", because if he had this spiritual X-ray he might be able to hear the kind of thing that people talked about when they turn to God, and as he listened to them in their praying, he could get in no uncertain way an evaluation of the kind of God to whom they prayed.

There's absolutely no question about it - - prayer is essential for the Christian. You and I cannot live without prayer. And last spring when I was anticipating the series of sermons to be preached this fall and winter, without too much hesitation and without any reservation whatsoever, it seemed right and proper that we ought to spend the next few weeks, as we come together on a Sunday morning, to sit at the feet of Jesus, the Men of Prayer, and to learn of Him how to pray.

Each of us ought to find himself in the company of the disciples. You may remember, as it's recorded in Luke and in Matthew - - "As He was praying in a

certain place, one of his disciples came to him and said, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Do you remember His answer? He said unto them, "When ye pray, say, Our Father, who art in heaven," and then He gave them the pattern and the model for their prayer life.

It is absolutely important that we should note at once the name which Jesus uses for God. For after it's all said and done, the secret to praying is in using the right name for God, for name is descriptive of character, name reveals identity, nature. Jesus said, "When ye pray, say Father--Our Father, who art in heaven."

But the cynic immediately replies and says....reference to God as father is to use a human descriptive - - this is, and you know the word they use for it--anthropomorphism - - this is making God in our likeness! ...and he says, this is not good, for none of us has a right to project his own image against the face of God and say God is like us.

Well what do you say to a man who says you're using a human descriptive for God when you say God is like a father? Well, there's only one answer to givethe only vocabulary we have is a human vocabulary. The only words that we can use are the words that have meaning for us. When you think in terms of God - -

....infinite.....eternal.....divine....

..we have our limitation, for we are the finite, trying to describe the infinite; we are the prisoners of this world, trying to tell somebody else about what the eternal is like. Well, the redeeming factor, however, is that if we are to use a human descriptive, we take the finest and the best known to the mind of man, and we say this is what God is like. That's what Jesus did. He suggests for our use

the very same name that He used.

But again the redeeming factor lies in the qualification that goes with it. It's Our Father who is in Heaven. It's not just "Father" - - it's Heavenly Father." You see, we take our best, and then we cast it against the ultimate, we cast it in the framework and the structure of that which lies over and beyond us - - over and beyond us is Heaven. We cannot comprehend it...so we say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven"this is the God to whom we are to pray.

Now when we say "Our Father, who art in heaven" we can be eternally grateful to God and to Jesus Christ that Heaven is His abiding place. For earth is no longer safe for anyone, and I don't say that facetiously. For the first time in the history of man, man, who is made of dust, can create dust. For the first time in the history of man, he is capable of annihilating himself, and his race.

Incidentally, we are, as you might know, a generation of sky-watchers. I suppose it began very largely back with Hiroshima, when we looked and we saw something mushrooming skyward...and then we were to learn that it could rain upon earth its scorching dust, and we've never been the same since. Once we thought the heavens were friendly...now we are afraid. We have bomb-bearing birds, we have roaring rockets, we have circling satellites - - ingenious devices of man....and we have come to face grim reality, that if something should happen, there's no place to hide! So as we watch the heavens, so as we become the generation of sky-watchers, we know nothing but insecurity...we are afraid.

When life was simple, the Psalmist could say, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills" - - his way of saying, "I'll look heavenward, because from Heaven

comes my help," and when he thought of God he cast his eyes heavenward. This is the age in which we live....we are frightened by the hell that can come to us from the heavens.

There was a time, perhaps some of you may know it, when insurance policies used to have a phrase like this: 'an act of God'- - it was their way of covering anything so calamitous, not caused by man.....and when they thought of the worst possible thing that could come by way of destruction, they didn't say it came by man's hand---they had a way of thinking that God was responsible. Calamity, tragedy that man could not account for, was referred to as 'an act of God.'

Now the story is a bit different. Man has become the great annihilator. It takes but the pressure of man's finger upon a button to send out rays of dust that can crumple the greatest of our cities.....and all of this, you see, since we re-discovered the heavens. Maybe there's truth in the seer who says to us it isn't simply re-discovering the heavens that we can rule...ours is the generation, now, that must re-discover the Heaven of heavens.....and when we think of Heaven, think in terms of God. For as far as earth is concerned, there is no security this side of Heaven. The ancients mastered that lesson when they said in their prayer, "Our Father, who art in Heaven."

It's one thing to know where God is - - in Heaven above, ruling supremely, waiting there, watching over us.....now what is God's attitude in Heaven above toward us? - - we who are the creators of dust, we who are the creators of death-dealing dust - - what is He like?

The name for God remains. Jesus gave us no alternative. He said, "He is

like a father," and when you take the word father and think of the finest and best of which the mind is capable of thinking, what does it mean? It means God has responsibility for us because a father has responsibility for his children....it means God will protect us, for this is what we children think in terms of our father---the one to whom we can go in time of need, to protect and to defend. Father means love, father means authority. We live in our father's house....and there was a time when he ruled, firmly--not because he wanted his ego exalted, but because he knew only as he ruled firmly would order be brought into the household, and with that order there would come strength and stability.

When we pray we must understand the basic nature and character of God...

...He is father-like

...One who loves us

...One who holds himself responsible for us

...but would you believe me if I were to tell you that even this descriptive for God has become a stumbling-block for some people! No less a man than Martin Luther hesitated to think of God in terms of father because of his own father. Hans Luther was stern and unbending - - some of us, as we read about him, are almost convinced that he was a loveless sort of person.

There was once a boy who played freely in the streets of a small town. It meant a great deal to frolic with youngsters his age, and they gave themselves with complete abandon to all the games that delight the hearts of boys. But when the hour came when men returned from work, he would listen for the footsteps of his father. Now his father was a drunkard, and when he came home he was a vile man, and he was far from being gracious. His language was ugly, and he

could lay his hand to a rod. And when the father came home the child would run - - run away from the father....he was afraid.

Maybe when you and I think of God as father, we, too, might be prone to run--not that God is evil, but because we, His children, have been bad....we have squandered His love....we have dissipated His kindness and His mercy...we have disobeyed. All this, you see, is involved with the word father.

On Friday I waited at National Airport to greet a friend who is going overseas on a two-years assignment. And as I waited there for him to come, a man in uniform approached me. He identified himself. He's making a career of the Army, and when he was stationed here at Walter Reed he and his family attended Saint Luka Church. He told me of his last tour of duty, separated from his family, his young children. And he said, "Pastor, I hope the next assignment will be one where I can be with them, for when I have been away for as long as I have been away this time, I have to learn to know them all over again, and they have to learn to know me."

When World War II was over, there were men who had spent three years in Europe, in the Pacific...and when they came back the wife and the mother found herself, as far as her babies, her children, were concerned, with a stranger in the house....and she had the task of introducing their children to their father who had been away.

Maybe that's the way it is between God and us.....

...not that God's been away!

...not that God's been in some foreign clime!

...but we've been away....we are the alien ones.

And what is prayer, beloved? Prayer is always a return to God - - prayer is

always a coming to Him. And the grandest descriptive for God, aside from the name of Saviour for Christ, is The Waiting Father...who waits for us.

Well, week by week we'll be turning, now, to the subject of the Lord's Prayer. The first lesson has to be learned aright...

...be sure, when you pray, you use the right name for God

...be sure, when you pray, you bring Him into clear and proper

focus: He is nothing less than Father--Heavenly Father--

who in the only security known to the mind of

man--that which is over and above this world---

waits to receive us and to deal graciously.

...and the most wonderful of all His blessings are necessarily reserved for the children who come to Him most often....in love, and out of obedience.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HALLOWED BE THY NAME"

Today's sermon is the second in the series based upon the general theme of
The Lord's Prayer:

"And when he was praying in a certain place,
when he finished, one of his disciples came
to him and said, Lord, teach us to pray, as
John also taught his disciples.
And he said unto them When ye pray, say,
Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be
thy name - - "

God has a way of putting words into our mouths. That's exactly what
Jesus Christ was doing now. Fortunately, however, for them, it was at their
invitation, it was at their request. For they were in need of a pattern for
praying - - they needed to have a model, and they knew not how they could do
it for themselves. So Jesus, the Master Teacher, adhering to a basic prin-
ciple in all learning, begins by putting words into their mouths.

Any parent, any teacher does this sort of thing. This is one way by
which we learn--making certain that they become acquainted with the right
words. God has a way of putting words into our mouths. Significant enough
that the first word that He taught them to use was the name for God - - -
"When ye pray, say - - "make sure you've got the right name.

And almost in the same breath, immediately He says - - "Let that name
always be made holy - - " ...don't ever have an image of God when God's halo
isn't present - - - "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name - - "

God has a name. Namelessness means obscurity. You and I go into a

meeting...we see someone - - the person makes an impression upon us. It may be that we have seen the person before. We are restless, we are uneasy..."Who is it?Who is it?" ...and then we take the trial run of relationships.....
..."Where have I seen him before - - what's the connection?" - - but the basic question: who is it? what's his name? Namelessness always means obscurity. God delights in clarity...

God wants us to know who He is

God wants us to know what He is like

...and a name defines, and a name describes.

Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if you and I never had a name for God? There was a time when people did not have a name for God, back at the very, very beginning. When they thought about God they used a series of unpronounceable letters---they couldn't even call the Great Jehovah by name. This created a barrier....this kept them separated from God.

...in Japan, within your knowledge and mine, when the Emperor was recognized to be divine, none of his subjects dared face him unless they were bidden to do so. They either turned the back or lowered the head, and they could never be allowed to be above him. How could an Emperor be near to his subjects when he remained so unapproachable?How could a God become real to his people whose name they dare not use? - - whose name they could not pronounce?

How close we become to people when we are given the privilege of using their first name! How much more at ease we seem to be when we know someone's name! Even in the presence of a tiny tot...

"Tell me your name, little girl".....

"What's your name, sonny?"

...and when we reach the first name barrier we permit ourselves a kind of intimacy

in the relationship which we feel we need.....

...well, God wants us to know Him

God wants us to use His name

...and so in the development of God and God's relationship with man He revealed himself and made His name known.

In the selection of the Psalms there's one in particular that I like very much. It's Psalm 115, if I remember correctly. The Psalmist in that selection is contrasting his God with the other gods of the people round about him. And he only has one thing in mind, and you catch it very quickly - -

...his God is so much more wonderful!

...this God of Israel--this God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. And one of the reasons why his God is so much more wonderful is because he knows His name. There are many people in the seemingly religious who know there is a Greater One, but they do not know his name. The African said to the Christian missionary, "Well, we always knew there was Someone, but not until you came did we know who He was, what He is - - and now we can call Him by name."

Names are important. Shakespeare, incidentally, dealt only in half-truth when he said "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet".ah, but a rose is something more than fragrance! Names are important. They describe--they define.

The Bible is a book of names. It gives the proper name for God. It gives the name for God's people. For the ancient Jew name was always indicative of character, a name told you what the person was.

God has a name.

And He wants us to know it - - and He wants us to use it.

But did it ever occur to you what great risk God took when He told us His name?---what great risk God took when He allowed us to use His name? Any man in any position knows the peril that exists in "name-dropping," -- when people who have known him for even such a short period exploit this relationship and use the name, sometimes in an ill-advised way and sometimes for purely selfish purposes. This is always the risk that we run, once we come to know someone by his first name.

If this is true in a human relationship, how much more so it is between God and us. For our lips can be unclean and our hearts cannot be pure, and once we have been given God's Name we can mis-use it and we can abuse it. God's name is unique, just as God is unique. There is no other name like God. And just because that happens to be true His name must be kept sacred and holy---it must never be without its halo. And God, taking the risk of giving us His name---like a father gives his name to his children.....the child can turn out bad, but he still has his father's name, even though he may drag that name into the dust and into a life of shame. This is the risk that any father takes. This most certainly is the risk that God took when He made us in His image, in His likeness, and called us by His name.

But God does not do this easily. God does not do this recklessly. He may take the risk, but He will still hold us responsible for what we do with His name. That's why in the Commandments we can't possibly ignore it -- - "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain, for God will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain." God doesn't do this just for His sake -- God does it for our sake. For you and I can't afford to have a God without a halo! You and I can't afford to have a God who is anything less

than sacred. Your salvation and mine rests in the fact that His name is holy - - no other name, under Heaven, whereby we can be saved. God, knowing this, God says, "This is My Name....you can use it....but in the same breath I tell you this---always pray that My Name be kept holy, for therein lies your salvation."

Now God gives His name to us - -

God gives His name to His world - -

God gives His name to His people - -

...and He wants us to treat it with respect. You've heard me tell you before that the devout Mohammedan used to say that he would never so much as discard a single scrap of paper, no matter how small, because on it the name of Allah, the name of God, could be written. This is implicit, you see, in our thought of God's name being holy. God gives His name to all His children, and you and I keep His name holy when we hold in reverence and respect the soul of any human being, no matter how, to us, apparently insignificant - - still a soul for whom Jesus died - - still a soul precious in the sight of God.

I used to say to our boys and girls in Confirmation Class - (I'm quite sure they forget it easily) - but I used to say to them when we discussed the Commandments....

Can you understand why the commandment of keeping God's name holy is so important? For once you lose respect for something that's sacred you've lost the most valuable thing that the soul of man can experience. Now, that you might understand this, I say, what would happen to your respect and your devotion for your mother if every time you were prone to curse or to speak pro-

fanely you took your mother's name, and you asked her to consign somebody to Hell, or you asked your mother to denn someone.....what happens now to your inherent respect for your mother? Something will be spoiled with this relationship.

By the same token, only more so, when a man drags God's name down he loses something that he cannot afford to lose. God has a name. Just because namelessness means obscurity, God delights in clarity - - He wants us to know who He is. So He told us His name. And that we might appreciate all that He is He wants us to keep His Name holy.

When Sir Christopher Wren was building that architectural gem in London which is St. Paul's Cathedral he laid down a very rigid rule: any workman who was heard to use God's name in vain in the building of the Cathedral would be summarily dismissed; it just wasn't to be tolerated.

I tell you, God is the Great Builder. God is the Great Architect. God has designs for this world of ours - - brave and bold and wonderful designs. From the very beginning God laid it down in no uncertain way, that in the building of His world, none of us should ever be given the liberty of exploiting the use of God's name, through abuse or mis-use....."Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Now every time you and I pray we ought to think two things at the very beginning: how wonderful it is that we can come into the presence of God and call Him by name; and the second thing is that even in that prayer we might remember that in our every relationship God's holiness has to stay put. It's the one thing that God will never allow you and me to tamper with.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

ALL that we have, O God, and all that we are carries Your name. That's why the substance that we now bring to this altar cannot be withheld from Thee. It belongs to You by prior claim; You are the Great Giver. We simply pray now that it may go its way, that others, too, may be taught respect and reverence for the Name which is above every name, the only Name by which a man can be saved.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, this day carries Your name; it is the Lord's Day. This place in which we are found is known by Your name; this is God's House. We, the assembled congregation, are not primarily a people who hold together common membership in Saint Luke Church; this is but an expression of the fact that we are the People of God—we are called by Your name.

AND, HEAVENLY FATHER, this world of which we are a part, all other indications to the contrary, is still our Father's world. You made it. You will redeem it. You will judge it. Help us, then, to so order our lives, in our relationship to everyone that we meet, in our relationship to every program that claims us in this congregation, we may hold ourselves responsible in Thy sight, for we carry Your name. As a father especially loves those who belong to him, so may we fervently espouse the Cause that claims Your name.

HEAVENLY FATHER, in Thy name we ask Thy blessing upon all those who worship here. In Thy name send them forth from this holy place to glorify Thy name, in the office, in the market-place—wherever they may go. In Thy name, O God, help us to order every program that claims our time and interest in this new season, this new chapter, which you have given us.

Now forgive each of us his sin; watch by all whom we love wherever they may be; and when our last hour may come, enable us by the love of Jesus to enter the Father's House, because His name belongs to us, in life, and in death.

OUR FATHER, Who art in Heaven.....

September 15, 1963

"THY KINGDOM COME"

It's some-where in northern Italy, I cannot tell you the name of the town nor the parish church. I would recall it for you now only because of what happened there. A rather strange thing occurred every time the devout worshipper came to the holy place to give praise to God. The church was on a hill, and some twenty feet away from the main entrance was a retaining wall. Now in the midst of this retaining wall was a blank space. But every time the devout worshipper went by he made the sign of the Cross--whether it was a holy day, in the middle of the week, whether it was when he came to Mass on Sunday. The children did it, the young people did it, the older people did it. If you were to ask any one of them "Why this act of reverence? Why do you do this here?", they might not have been able to answer except to say, "Well, my father before me did it, and I do it now as a matter of custom."

When the wall was in a sad state of deterioration, the parish priest decided to call the village stone-mason to repair it. And when he came he peeled off one layer of plaster after another--that is, at this blank space. Lo and behold, when he came to the first coat of plaster that had been applied, and had that torn off, then he came upon the original treatment of that blank space... and there he could detect, faintly perhaps, but still clearly to his eye, the outline of the Holy Mother, the Madonna with Child. So you see that when the wall was built originally, and when the devout worshipper came to that spot, he had his act of reverence, he made the sign of the Cross...but when necessary repairs were in order, and they couldn't find an artist to touch up or to reproduce the Madonna and the Child, they simply plastered over it.....and once the first coat of plaster had been applied, devout and good people of that parish

could never quite forget that beneath that coat of plaster was the Holy Mother and the Child, and they continued to make the act of reverence, to use the sign of the Cross. One generation continued the custom after another.

Now the point of what I'm saying is this -- you and I may run the risk of doing some good thing customarily, you and I may run the risk of doing some good thing habitually. It could be like coming to church--so we were taught... ..so our elders to this day come to church and we follow the same pattern. It could be such a thing as praying the Lord's Prayer----so our elders prayed it... ..so we were taught to pray it...so we pray it -- habitually, customarily. Now don't misunderstand it. Anything that's good, even though done habitually, is still a good thing. But it's a far better thing when something that's good that's done habitually is done with an intelligent appreciation.

That simple comment that was made at the lectern--this justifies some of us in continuing the habit of coming to church, because we keep saying to ourselves that it's a necessity in our lives because this is one place where it's made easier for us to get the divine perspective, so that God becomes increasingly real to us beyond these walls. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, customarily, habitually, it is still a good thing...but it's a far better thing when it can be done habitually and customarily, with intelligent appreciation.

And that's the reason why this series of sermons is being preached. For each of us must needs come back again and ask certain questions of this prayer--to ask ourselves...

what do these words mean that I use?

why, of all the things that I might talk about

when I pray to God, do I follow this pattern?

Take this petition today, the third in this series on the Lord's Prayer:

"And after this manner pray ye: Our Father, who
srt in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. - - "

Whatever did happen to royalty? It's fairly run its course. And the only hold it seems to have upon some of us is because of its romantic remembrance...kings, queens, the prince, and always, of course, the lovely princess. In our day so few real kingdoms remain, and we have such a terrible dread of dictatorship and those who rule absolutely. But of all things that we go on praying, we use such a word as kingdom. We shan't omit the petition, and we've never been bold enough to use any other word except that word kingdom. What, now, do we mean by it?...and especially when we use these three words "thy kingdom come"?

Well maybe it isn't so much what we mean by the word kingdom as what Jesusa mesnt by it. For after all, it was Hia word and He is the one who put these words into our mouths. He talked a great deal about the Kingdom, in fact if you read the Gospel record you'll find that He talked about the Kingdom more than He tsiked about anything else. He talked about the Kingdom of Heaven, He talked about the Kingdom of God. And then when the day came when He had advanc-
ed enough with Hia disciples, He sent them out into the world, and He said - -
"You must go and you must teech and you must preach - - ! "and I would like to think thst one of the company turned to Him and ssid, "Master, what is it that you want us to preach? What shall we tell the people?"and you know the snswer.....

"Tell them that the Kingdom of God is nigh!

Tell them that the Kingdom of God is near at hand!

Tell them that it's happening now! it can happen to them--

in them, and through them! Today!"

So that disciple band went. And wherever they went they got a hearing, they were never at a loss for a congregation. For the people in that day of Jesus were thrilled to hear something about the kingdom. They were an oppressed people - - it meant the yoke of the oppressor would be thrown off - - it meant the promise of a glorious golden dawn--freedom from war, strife, bitterness - - their kingdom would be established. They were eager to hear it.

But then what happened to their kingdom? Was it only a dream? And was Jesus Christ anything but a realist when He talked about the Kingdom of God being established here and now? And in the same spirit you and I who pray this prayer, millions of people offer it to God every day - -

"O God, your Kingdom - -

Let it come! ..Let it come! ..Let it come!"

What is the true picture round about us? We who pray the prayer for the Kingdom, we have not banished war from the world; in fact, we are the most insecure and the most uneasy of all people because there remains the prospect, in our day, of the most deadly of wars that the mind of man could possibly conceive. We are not a people free from strife and envy and bitterness. The hope remains, but the sad fact does not always justify the hope.

What, then, shall we say? Well, I think it lies in our failure to understand what Jesus meant by the Kingdom. You see, we still cling tenaciously to our interpretation of the word. Kingdom means a king. And a king is one who has absolute rule--dictatorship...and he can, because he is king, overnight change the order of things--the world round about him. When we studied history we always studied what happened during the reign of certain kings--how the whole political, social, economic order was changed!...and we gave the king credit for it....this is what the king decreed!

Now somewhere in our thinking, when we talk about a king, we want Jesus Christ, as our King, to so superimpose His will upon the world that the whole exterior order round about us is changed. We want freedom. We want democracy. We want the thrust of war to be taken away. And somewhere in our thinking we allow ourselves to believe that all of this can be done by official decree--- that all of this is something that happens over and beyond us, outside us.

Well, when Jesus was talking about the Kingdom He wasn't talking about the exterior order of things. I'm not so sure that He was even talking about changing the order itself---desireble and necessary as that may be. I'm not so sure that God's specialty is changing anybody's world - - the East, the South, or the West.

God's specialty is in changing people. The world isn't changed by Godthe world is changed by people who become changed people by God. That's why whenever He talked about the Kingdom of God He talked about the human heart. The Kingdom that God concerns himself with is your heart and my heart. And if this glorious age for which we have been dreaming has been delayed, it may be because all along the line everybody thought that God was going to change the order himself. We want bitterness to be taken away---but in somebody else's heart. We want freedom of opportunity---but always for somebody else to express, not necessarily me.

When Jesus was talking about His Kingdom He had a way of focusing His eye upon people, one person at a time. And one day He saw a woman, Mary Magdalene, a woman with a terrible past. And somehow when she was confronted by Jesus Christ, she allowed Him to say, "Mary, your heart belongs to me, I would like to rule it - - I would like to be the master of your soul".Mary Magdalene allowed Him to become that to her. And the moment that happened, she was in the Kingdom of God!

...there was a man by the name of Zaccheaus, a scoundrel of scoundrels, who defrauded his own people--hated and despised by them. One day he sat down in front of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ looked into the very heart of Zaccheaus, and Jesus gave Zaccheaus to understand that He would like to rule his heart, He would like to abide in his soul. ...and Zaccheaus gave Him the green light. And from that moment on Zaccheaus was inside the Kingdom of Heaven.

.....the Emperor was still in Rome....and the King still had his throne in Judea, ...and the people on the street were still the same people - - the world outside was not changed overnight - -

...but Zaccheaus was changed

...Mary Magdalene was changed

...this is what it means to have the Kingdom come. The Kingdom comes, person by person, - - person through person.

There are those who used to maintain that it was a foolish thing to pray this prayer because the kingdom of this world has always belonged to God. When did God give up ownership to this world? The psalmist used to believe that He did the next thing to that, and the prophet likewise. They used to talk in the Old Testament about God shielding His face, God turning His back, God going away from us - - God abandoning His world....and then we coined what in my judgment is one of the saddest of all words in our vocabulary--"God-forsaken" ...and that's a descriptive that some people use for this world - - we are a "God-forsaken" people. And this is the most terrible thing that could ever happen to a people, if God should forsake them.

But then, looming always on the horizon is the figure of Jesus Christ. And what is Jesus Christ but God coming back to us - - God coming back and saying--"I will not leave you - I will not forsake you...I will claim you--in your

sin and despite your sin....and every good thing that I would delight in sharing with you I want you to have---you don't need to be denied it...only ask for it!..
..only pray for it!"

....and the Kingdom of God comes to those who desire it

- - and only to those who desire it.

When I was a lad I used to have trouble going to sleep at night. And I would think about the end of the world. I was always afraid it was going to happen before I grew up. A childish fear---to this day I can't fully explain why I was ever afraid of something like that. Maybe you can say it was a child's ~~ambition~~ ambition who didn't want the world to come to an end until he had his chance at it.

But now as I have become older that childish fear has disappeared and vanished. But I have not had done with my fears---they still remain. The character of the fear is different. Now I am afraid that I should die before the Kingdom of God should come to me! For to die outside the Kingdom is pure, unadulterated Hell. But the Kingdom belongs only to those who desire it, who pray for it, who with singleness of heart want it. Want what? To have Jesus Christ rule supremely the human heart.

In our better moments we may desire it; in our less good moments we pray, "Thy kingdom come - - but not now!"because that would mean an alteration in my way of thinking, it could mean that I would have to give up my prejudices! There are people who die by their prejudices, even as there are people who live by them.

When Jesus was here on earth He gave us to understand that Bethlehem was something more than a place on the map. It's the hill country in every man's

soul...and He'll never have done until He has made it plain to you and to me that that's where He wants to set up His absolute rule.

We pray for it. Let us pray for it intelligently - - and above all things, honestly.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen, September 15, 1963

DID we not cross this threshold, O God, reverently?

HAS not this hour that has come and gone been in itself an evidence of our devotion?

HAVE we not here opened our hearts to Thee?

It's so much easier to open our hearts to Thee here.
But enable us to be able, O God, that once we turn our backs upon this altar, Thy presence will continue.
Thou art the Eternal Companion; Thou art the Abiding Pilgrim. Go with us, that we may always be in Thy presence.

HEAR now the prayers that we offer to Thee, prayers for those whom we love, for those whom we know to be in special need.
We name them in our hearts before Thee now...the lonely
...the frustrated...the dejected...anyone whom we know who thinks he can walk away from Thee.

We likewise name in our hearts before Thee those who have recently found a new joy, a spring in their step, a light in their eye, claimed by some new, fresh and noble purpose.
May the flame of the spirit continue to glow.

NOW, HEAVENLY FATHER, hear our prayer;
Forgive each of us his sin, and when our last hour may come, suffer none of us to fall from Thee.

OUR FATHER.....

September 29, 1963

"THEIR ANGELS"

The current series of sermons being preached on the general theme of the Lord's Prayer is interrupted today in order to preach this sermon, which bears the title, "Their Angels", based upon the Gospel lesson for this day, and also in recognition of the cause of Christian education as we know it through this parish. The text is the 10th verse of the 18th chapter of Matthew:

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

To those of us in the twentieth century it's the latter part of this text that's strangely put. And to be perfectly honest with you, it would be a lot easier not to preach this sermon than to preach it; for it deals with the subject of angels, and we are a people so sophisticated that in many places we've long given up the idea of believing in angels. And whenever that happened, we became the poorer for it. For there's always something to be said for a belief in angels.

Now I know it's an exceedingly difficult thing for me to stand here at this sacred desk and to tell you what an angel is like, and what they do, and why we have them, so that once I have answered these questions it could be to your complete satisfaction. You see, we deal, now, in the realm of the spirit. It is not easy to talk about spiritual things to the practical-minded man. How can I tell you what the love is like that a man knows in his heart for a maid? Now can I describe to anyone who has never known it what a parent's love is for a child? How can I describe, define, for any man what the love of God is like

for a person who doesn't believe in God? To talk about spiritual things is an exceedingly difficult thing.

There's so much more about angels that I don't know than the things that I do know about them. But there's just enough in this text that commands me to invite you to give it attention. There's enough good in this text, that once you read it again and again it will hold your soul in good stead.

Let me begin by telling you that our Blessed Lord believed in angels. You remember what happened when He went into the wilderness and endured that terrible temptation experience---how does the passage end? "and then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him." -- our Blessed Lord knew what it was to have God raise up helpers, here on this earth, in order to sustain the soul of His only begotten Son. Our Blessed Lord believed in angels because these are His words--the words of the text, from the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ, in which He is laying down for us the grand and glorious thought that every child has an angel in heaven, watching over him, caring for him.

The Bible writers believed in angels. Many a passage in the Old Testament refers to the angelic host; in fact, they call them "the army of the Lord." In Jewish days they even believed that every nation had its own patron angel. There's a reference made to the angel that Peter had; Job talks about his angel. There are different orders, different degrees, different ranks -- do we not talk about Cherubim and Seraphim? do we not talk about archangels and angels? is it something more than romantic imagery? have the words no meaning for our day? has the concept of an angel become for us passe? We are the sophisticated ones, you see.

Well, while there is much that I cannot tell you about the angelic host, I

would begin by telling you that in the thought-form of the Lord, it was not alien to the mind of Jesus Christ. I would begin at that point.

And I would say, in the second place, that angels served a holy purpose, because they give evidence afresh that it's conceit for any one of us to believe that you and I are the only ones that God ever created. We are the blundering humanity - - it's only my vanity that permits me to think that God limited Himself to me, to us. There's an exceedingly precious thought, and there's justification for it, that maintains that before God created man He created the angels. And He created the angels, so this thought maintains, that they would be with Him, that they could share, not in the act of creation, but in observing it...and even Scripture itself tells us how they shouted for joy in the things that God the Creator was able to do. It's only conceit on my part that permits me to think that God, having made me and put me here on this earth, called it a day's work, and no longer concerned Himself with anything better.

For no matter how noble my impulses may be, I am still a creature of clay. I may have the soul which God has given, but I am still human. So, for those who believe in angels, there is the precious thought that God has peopled Heaven with angels, spiritual beings, so that He no longer dwells in a solitary way, and it's these angels become His messengers, His representatives, His ambassadors.

There's also a school of thought that maintains a very lovely thing: that is, for each one of us there is a counter-part in Heaven - - the better you - - the nobler you - - the you who on this earth is in the process of sanctification.

Now, whatever else you may or may not understand about angels, let's look once more at the text. The text says "concern yourself with children; for in heaven above every child has a angel"but Jesus Christ also said something more, even more precious than this. He also said "Every child's angel has direct

access to the Heavenly Father" - - that's what He meant when He said " - - and in heaven their angels always behold the face of God." Now whatever else you may not understand by the text, this we can understand - - that in the sight of God nothing is more precious than the soul of a child. Of the highest importance in the mind of God are children, so much so that God has seen fit to assign an angel for every child.

Now I'll grant you, it's the imagery of the Oriental court whereby the king or the emperor or the chief sat upon his throne, and in his royal chamber only a limited number of people had direct access to him. Jesus says, "It's just like that....in heaven above only a limited number of people have direct access to the face of God - - but of those who do, the angels of children are always given this priority." To put it in another way....God never turns His face away from the soul of a child! The guardian angels of children always have this privilege of immediate, direct access to God.

This sermon is being preached today for the simple reason that we observe not only the day in the calendar of the Church, but interestingly enough, we recognize the cause of Christian Education. Let no one among you permit yourself for a moment to think that I minimize the necessity for continuing education for those who are older because in this sermon from this point on I'll be talking about children in the realm of Christian Education. An adult is still a child in the process of learning the truths of God. We never reach the place where any one of us can permit himself to think that he has arrived in the knowledge of religious truth.

But most of our efforts in the cause of Christian education are spent in the interest of those who are young. And why do we do it? Because we begin at the place where we must begin. What we do we do in God's name, and therefore what is important for us must be the kind of thing that's forever important to God; and

the important thing in the sight of God is the soul of a child. That's exactly what this passage of Scripture means - - children have angels, and these angels have direct access to God...that's exactly how important they are!

Now what is it that ought to happen in our relationship with children, when we think of the cause of Christian education? Well, what is it to educate someone? We take it from the Latin---to educate someone is to "lead out" the best that is there, and also to lead him in the direction of the best. To turn the mind and the soul of a child in the right direction is the primary aim of Christian education, and this orientation is always toward Jesus Christ. There is nothing nobler that you and I can ever do than to lead a child to Jesus Christ. This is the greatest of all blessings that any one of us can ever experience - - to lead someone to Jesus Christ.

God takes this so seriously that God has assigned a guardian angel for every child to see that this should be accomplished. God never intended any person to go to Hell....it's the will of God that all men should be saved...., it's the will of God that all people should be turned toward Him. And God is not content to allow this to happen just here on earth. We need the help of Heaven, too, and the guardian angels enable us to do this by their interest in us.

Now if it can be said that the greatest of all blessings is to lead someone in the right direction, and particularly in the field of Christian education to lead someone to Jesus Christ, it can also be said that the most terrible of all curses is to lead someone in the opposite direction....and this happens.

This is the great responsibility that rests upon us who are adults. A child is to be led, a child is to be directed. They tell us there was a man who was dying. And he called for a priest, or a pastor, to come and hear him

out - - he had great anxiety of soul. This was his confession: in his younger days he was part of a prank in which he and others turned the sign post around at the crossroads and shunted people in the wrong direction....and he was plagued by the thought that he had caused people to travel the wrong way. Apply the truth, my friend, to those of us who deal with young people and children at the crossroads in life, if we should turn them in the wrong direction,God wants them to be saved

.....angels in Heaven pray in their behalf

....you and I who are entrusted with their responsibility here on earth must have a similar ardor for the salvation of their souls. To lead a child in the direction of God is to be worthy of the greatest blessing that God can give to any man.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

October 13, 1963

"GIVE US DAILY BREAD"

It's a good and happy arrangement that provides in the series of the sermons on the Lord's Prayer that a sermon dealing with daily bread should come on this Sunday which marks the Festival of the Harvest. We who live in suburbia do not have ample opportunity to daily recognize the fact that it is by the Lord's Hand that we are sustained - - not now so much, as when in a rural society the farmer went out and sowed his seed and waited patiently for God to give the increase...or perhaps for those who lived in a smaller community, where each house at one time seemed to have had its garden plot, and day by day the evidence was there that man lives by the bread which comes from the Hand of God. So we in Saint Luke Church this day properly recognize the Festival of the Harvest. The committee has decorated the chancel, the Nave, the narthex, the Chapel of the Grateful Heart with the fruits of the good earth, that we might never, never forget that we are dependent creatures.

There are many definitions for prayer. Here's one that you might want to remember: Prayer is finding oneself in the very Presence of God. And when that happens, what does one do?

One ought to begin where one ought to begin - - by giving God undivided attention. Jesus, in the pattern for prayer that He gave us, in the prayer that carries His name, said, "When ye pray, say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"you see, once ushered into the Presence of God, we give Him undivided attention - - we give the reverence that's due His name - - we offer ourselves submissive to Him - - we ask that His name be hallowed, we ask that

His will be done....and then, as it were, once we had talked about these things...

...once we've told God that we know exactly who He is

....once we've told Him how wonderful that we know Him to be

....once we've told Him that we know the things that are of

primary concern to Him, such as His will and His Kingdom...

....then it seems as though God leans toward us, bending over very, very graciously, and God says to us - - "Now what can I do for you?"

" - - Now that you know that I am your Heavenly Father - -

now that you know that my primary concern is that My

will is to be done on earth - -

...what is it that you want?

...what can I give you? how much? when? how often?"

My friend, you have a right to understand this petition for bread in this manner, for Christ, giving us the lesson in praying, says that when you begin to ask God for something you may begin at this point, you may talk about bread.

It's significant, isn't it, that in the first of the "askings" that God permits us to raise in His presence (now be careful - - you aren't make more of this than can be allowed) but in the mind of God, even before we talk about the forgiveness of sin, God gives His permission to talk about bread.

It is understandable, though, if God's will is to be done on earth, if His Kingdom is to come, if we, His creatures, are to serve Him in love and order our lives according to His good pleasure, we just can't do it as disembodied spirits. We are physical creatures, we are human beings, and even saints, illustrious as they may be, for all the good that they would do, can't possibly

do it if weakened by hunger. So God provides for daily bread.

God knows that if we are to do His will we must be made strong, we must be strengthened by the food that we receive from the table that He spreads. You have a right to begin at this point. You have a right to think of it in this way. God does know that we are physical creatures, God does know that we have physical needs, God does know that we have hunger pangs. Even a child, the first need that he makes known to his mother is his hunger, and to the day that we die, granted that we're normal beings, we'll always be reaching somewhere for bread. And while our Lord did say on one occasion "Man does not live by bread alone" -- He never for a single second implied the fact that he could live without it. So this is the point at which we begin when we deal with our asking, the things for which we ask God to give us, and God says, "You may begin by asking for bread."

And as soon as you and I recognize this we are in duty bound to say to ourselves, what a wonderful God we have, that God should have a concern for our total needs, that God knows that we can become hungry; and in doing so, of course, we see ourselves constantly as dependent creatures.

I can't explain it to you exactly, but there was a day when many of our church fathers ignored the fact that this petition dealt with plain, ordinary bread. I'm not so sure but what there might not have been a day when the fathers would have not looked so favorably upon even bringing the plain, ordinary loaf of bread -- there are at least four of them somewhere in the Nave and the chancel today -- as any kind of a reminder of the good Hand of the Lord. Why they ever allowed themselves to do it I can't quite tell you, but there was a time when most interpreters of the Scripture said that this petition does not deal

with plain, ordinary bread - - it deals with the Bread from Heaven; for God looks forever upon us as souls, and God's primary concern with us is only in the realm of the spirit.

But God made us, my friend, God gave us our bodies, God gave us this world with all of its physical characteristics and traits - - God created it, God called it good, and God is the source of all of its strength. We do well to constantly remind ourselves of this blessed truth.

I gather a great measure of encouragement when I come upon this significant fact of interpretation: that once when our Lord was talking again about prayer He told some of His disciples, "Whenever you pray, go into your closet, shut the door, and pray." Now for the typical home in Israel, for the typical Jewish home, there was only one section of the house on which there was a door attached, and that was the door where the food was stored. Jesus is saying, "Go into your larder, and within the sight of whatever provisions you've laid by, or the lack of it, and in the presence of the smell, the odors of the fruits of the good earth, there do your praying." When our Lord gave that simple instruction He was tying in magnificently the fact that when a man thinks of God he thinks of God who is the Great Provider - - for every need,

In the Old Testament there's always the element of godly, holy materialism. Amos, the shepherd prophet from Tekoa, talks about God's wrath, and God's wrath is going to come upon people who allow themselves to become insensitive to the physical needs. Some of us in this place today remember the urgency of the post-World War period as it began. We served on committees, we gathered funds, we made speeches, focusing the eye on America, the land on which no single bomb had ever dropped - - America, food-basket to the world.....and I remember an old gentleman saying to me, "This is right! You can't talk about the gospel of God's

love to a man who has no food on his table. You don't first preach to souls when men are hungry." This love must become incarnate. We minister to their needs, the physical needs of men, and this becomes the manifestation of God's concern....and then you may talk about the need of the soul.

When our Lord taught us to pray He inculcated in our minds the necessity of our dependence upon God which should serve as a grim reminder that all that we have God allows us to have, that His will might be done, that His Kingdom might come on earth - - and you are perfectly right, my friend, when you pray: "Bless, O Lord, these gifts to our use, that they may strengthen us, body and soul, that we may serve Thee well this day." No man has a right to eat a single morsel of food, so it would seem to me, without reminding himself that 'God spreads my table, that I might be strengthened to serve Him and to glorify His Holy Name with the life that I now live.'

Well, let us look at it now from the other side of the coin. We are also in duty bound to recognize this as the interpretation, that this is spiritual food. We are souls as well as bodies, and the soul must be fed. We may be a people who will never die from hunger, as far as the body is concerned, for we are the people, you see, who do not go to bed at night hungry...we are the people whose problem concerning food is one of surplus....we are a people who have to wrestle with the problem of overweight. But on the other hand, many of us could go to our graves with starved souls. And it is God who prepares the food for the soul as well as for the body.

The old Irish interpretation was, of this particular petition of the Lord's Prayer - - "Give us, O God, bread from Heaven, that our souls may be fed." We are physical enough that we'll always make known our craving for food - - to satisfy the hunger of the stomach men will steal, men will grab, men will ex-

pleit, men will do practically anything and everything under the sun to satisfy the need of the body.....and yet God keeps reminding us "I have already made the world so that it can yield its incresee - - there is enough food for everyone" - - that's the kind of world that God made. God says, "Your problem is not in not having enough - - your problem is learning to share."....this is what He speaks to us today.

But on the other hand, when it comes to the deep need of the soul, not everyone knows how to make his need known, not everyone knows that the hunger for the Word of God and only the hunger for the Word of God that needs to be satisfied. And maybe part of your job and my job is to open the eyes of people for the need for the food which God provides for the soul.

This is why you've noted the enthusiasm that I've had for every opportunity that's made available to you in Saint Luke Church to come for the nurturing of your souls. We begin even with the youngest...it's not only with the program of Christian education on Sunday - - but do you know that we now offer, every single day of the week as we follow the calendar of the public school year, an opportunity for seventy boys and girls in the Weekday Christian Nursery, in the Weekday Christian Kindergarten, to come that their souls might be nurtured?... ..do you know that we make perfectly plain to our Director of Youth Work that the only justification that we have for the youth program in Saint Luke Church is this: that through it and by it, in all phases of its endeavor, souls may be fashioned in the likeness of Jesus Christ, and that their spirits may be strengthened? - - that His Name in all things may be glorified.....do you know that it can be said that we have no right to offer any program in this parish if it does not mean feeding the souls of people, nurturing them in the spirit.

Whenever you pray for daily breed, think not only of the food on the table, but the nurturing of the soul as well. And when you are prone to become anxious and insecure, remind yourself of the precious thought of God.....our God is able to supply your every need - - day by day - - as God provides food for the body day by day, so God provides day by day food for the soul. There is always enough to make you strong against the need of any single day.

There are many times when I would like to have been in the presence of my Lord. If I could have been given only one or two times, I think without hesitation it would have been when one of the disciples came to Him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray,"for when our Lord taught them to pray, He gave them the secret for His life. Let me know how a man prays, and I'll tell you the kind of person that he is. So our Lord taught His disciples, and He gave them the pattern, and He said: "The first thing for which you may ask, without any hesitation, without any reservation, is for food, food for the bodies--food for the soul. God wants us to be strong - - body and soul. Let us remember that we are dependent creatures, and it is by His Hand that we are made strong.....and this in turn becomes the guerdon by which none of us can ever permit himself to despise the strength which God provides.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FORGIVE US - - "

Let me begin by saying something which you may not want to believe. Listen carefully. Some men are never nearer to God than at the point when they're farthest away. Now this you can believe, if the man that you have in mind is a sinner, someone who because of estrangement has wandered far, far away from God; and then he has the moment of re-orientation, when he completely turns around, and he sets his face toward God and his back against all the things that have lured him away. And whenever this happens, no matter how far away a man might have been from God, it is precisely at that point when he is nearer than he has ever been before. This happens, invariably, when a man is on his knees.

It happens when a man begins to say to God "Forgive me!" No matter what else he has ever said to God, it can't possibly happen till he says "Forgive!"... for it's when we cry for pardon that we find ourselves ushered into the very presence, into the very nearness of God. I say this to you on good authority. It is implicit in the fact that when our Lord taught His disciples to pray, He placed at the very center of the prayer the prayer for pardon. And it's essential for every man. The prayer for pardon is every man's prayer.

Now let's recall the prayer. He said - -

"Whenever you pray, say Our Father which art in
heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us - - -"

...you can't go any farther, after you've said everything that's preceded it, till you say "Forgive!" You and I, in our sober, honest moments, know exactly why this is true. You see, we call God holy, and we say His name should be kept

holy; we call Him Father, and that means we are His children....but in moments of sober reflection, even though we may call Him holy, we know how imperfect we ourselves are. We are the impure ones. God is holy - - we aren't.

In our nobler moments we say something to God about our being on His side...
...that's what you say every time you pray for the coming of His Kingdom, and the doing of His will - - that's you saying "God, I'm in harmony, I'm in agreement with what you want...God, I'm on your side!...and we want everything down here on earth the way it is in heaven"

...in our nobler moments we talk that way to God.

But then we become hypercritical. We don't always mean what we say. And we become lazy, for the doing of God's will exacts a great measure of our strength, and we become tired and weary...and the element of willful rebellion even enters the picture. Even though we know God's way is best, there are times when we prefer our own way.

Then we also come to God and we say, "Well, God, if you want us to do the things on earth the way they're done in heaven, you'll have to help us - - you'll have to feed us, God, you'll have to spread a table!"that's the other way of saying God causes the fields to yield their increase, that's the other way of saying God gives food to every man.

And so we've gone on record.....

...we call Him Father

...we say we desire His Kingdom

...we say that we want His will to be done

...and we even come to His table and eat of it, in the full

and certain knowledge that He makes us strong that His

purposes might be fulfilled.....but we dissipate our strength,
and we give ourselves to things that do not wear a halo....
...somewhere along the line we know ourselves for what we are.

And so does Christ. And that's precisely why when He gave the pattern prayer He made the central petition the cry for forgiveness. No matter what you may say, after everything has been said, we are the unworthy ones, we are the disobedient children.

Now when you use that prayer, you can have your choice of words. Some people say "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." If you were in a Baptist church this morning, or perhaps in a Reformed congregation, you might say, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive those who are indebted to us." And would you believe me, that some time ago, within the past decade, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church considered a resolution, someone thought he had a grand notion, and he proposed that all the Presbyterians, when they prayed the Prayer, would follow a uniform practice - - they would say, not, "Forgive us our debts"....they would not use the word "trespass" - - they'd say, "Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive those who sin against us", and I suppose the resolution received some favorable consideration, until someone, I am told, stood up and said, "But you can't use that word! It may be all right for us to say 'Forgive us our sins' - - but none of us can become presumptuous enough to say that he can forgive another man's sin--none of us can say 'as we also forgive those that sin against us' - - for the forgiveness of sin belongs only to God!"

Well, you can take your choice, anyway, we all come out at the same end. Every man is a debtor---you and I have never fully paid the debt that we owe even to ourselves. None of us ever fully pays the obligation to the better person

that he is. We're always inclined to level off, not to the man that we could become, but the man that we actually are. Every man is indebted to his better self.

None of us ever fully pays the debt that he owes to his neighbor; for a man is his neighbor's keeper, and our friends and our neighbors are denied much that they could have through us. And by the same token, we are indebted to them for all that they give to us...

...you can use the word debt for every man is indebted to God. What have we that we have not received?

You can use the word trespass, for down deep inside of us there's always the inclination to go into areas where we have no right to enter, to taste things that are not ours. We're always going over boundaries that ought not to be crossed, if not in deed, at least in thought.

If you're bold enough to use the word sin, it applies to every one of us. Whether you find it an encouraging thought or not, the truth remains that you and I are sinners to the very day that we die. We are the ones who are being redeemed by Jesus Christ, we are the ones who have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb. Until you and I breathe our very last, in the inner recesses of our hearts the Devil always has a way of raising his ugly head. This is a fact of life.

...So you see, it really doesn't make any difference, now, what word you may use. We all come out at the same end. Every single one of us fails in God's sight. We can never score 100% with Him. We will always fall short of the mark. And if we don't know it, Jesus does. And if we would not have put it in the Prayer, Christ says that's where it belongs, because you need to pray the Prayer,

and you'll never be nearer to Him than when you're on your knees, talking about pardon.

Now when you and I pray that Prayer, it's significant to note that we say "Forgive 'us'." You see, sinning is never a single-man affair. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if it were. Maybe if it were only something between God and me, it wouldn't be nearly as bad, if I should choose to go to Hell, and I should be the only one in the picture. But I'm not so sure that any man ever goes to Hell just by himself. By that I mean every diabolical influence at work in his life that drags him to the very depth of Hell has a way of contaminating other people's lives. Sin is never a solitary thing - - it's always social - - it's always corporate - - it always involves other people. That's why when our Lord put that prayer upon our lips He said, "Be sure that you say 'forgive us'"....and if you're inclined to be easy on yourself, to think that there are a lot of things that other people do that you don't do, yet we're involved with them, and all of us become part of the picture.

Now focusing on one man by himself for the moment, the prayer becomes every man's prayer for the simple reason that God does hold us responsible. That's the risk that He took when He gave us freedom of will. Man chooses to go to Heavenand a man chooses to go to Hell. That's why the prayer for pardon must always be part of the picture.

And what does forgiveness mean?

Let me tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean God looking at us, steeped in our sin, and saying, "It's all right, it doesn't matter." It does matter. It matters to us! It matters to other people! It matters to God!

Why do you suppose we have the Cross on the altar? Why do you suppose we keep

it as the eternal symbol of our faith? Sin does matter---it matters that much!

...whatever else you can say about forgiveness, you can't say that forgiveness is forgetting...God patting you on the back and saying, "Forget it, my child." He may say, put your sins far, far away, but He can't forget. And it's foolish, glib talk when you and I say "forgive and forget." If I know anything at all about this process of God's redeeming grace, this cleansing of my soul, I know there is a point where He takes me, and He almost forces me to stare into the very face of my sin, that I may see it for what it is....and seeing it for what it is, I might remember that in the recollection of it I might be less willing to sin tomorrow. So, you see, He wants me to remember, if only that I might not do it again.

...whatever else forgiveness is, it isn't this: God removing the penalty, and God removing the stain and the scar. There's an exceedingly precious story in the Bible about a man who was a prodigal, a man who took his journey into the far country. Now the grandest thing about that story is this, that when he came to his senses and came back, his father was waiting. And his father put his arms around him and loved him and claimed him anew. But don't you think for a single minute that the wasted years of that reckless life were wiped away. To the day that the prodigal son died, he was handicapped by his years of sinning. Even God can't take that away. Remove the guilt? Yes. But God cannot restore wasted years....

....there are many things that I ask of my Heavenly Father as I serve as your Pastor, and whatever years remain for me as a Pastor. And one of the things that I ask is that I might always have an enthusiasm for young people's work. One reason is this: that with whatever strength God gives me I might always be able to challenge them to the fact that the impressionable years of their

youth are significant, that they are years to be given to Jesus Christ in the NOW, that you can't gamble on the fact that when you become older, that's when you take Jesus seriously - - it's a risk that no man should ever take, because none of us has the guarantee that the other years will come.

Well, if forgiveness is not these things, then what is forgiveness?

....Forgiveness is God in Christ, taking note of your sin, calling it by name.

....Forgiveness is God in Christ, doing for you what you can't do for yourself---give new life, fresh motivation, reverse, conversion.

....Forgiveness is God in Christ, remembering your sin....

...but God in Christ, saying, "Even though I remember it, I refuse to allow it to separate Me from My love for you."

That's what forgiveness is.

....It's God in Christ, putting His arms around you and saying,

"You are a sinner. You are my disobedient child. And I, God, have hated what you have done.....but I love you - - I restore you as My child."

...when that happens to you, you will call it by its rightful name, the most wonderful thing of which the human soul can know. And only the redeemed know what it is.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

October 27, 1963

"THE PROTESTANT TRADITION"

The sermon on this day bears the title, "The Protestant Tradition." Let me read as the basis for this sermon portions of certain verses from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the 3rd chapter:

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;
And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Of course you remember how it happened, but let me recall it for you very quickly....

The Time.....it was near the end of October, 1517

The Place....the university town of Wittenburg

The Chief Actor, if you please.....an Augustinian friar, a professor of theology, a struggler in the Faith, a searcher of the Truth - - - Martin Luther

He had known great anguish in soul....

"How can I be sure that God loves me? how can I be sure that I am being saved? how (if I may paraphrase it) can I read the lines of love upon the face of God?
...not only this anguish, but the sickness of heart that I have when I think of my beloved Church, victim of error!"

Against this turmoil, he used a very significant stroke of strategy.

He felt there should be people who should talk to him about it. He felt there should be people who would freely discuss this. So he went to the door of the castle church, the evening of October 31, and there posted 95 different things that he felt ought to be debated, ought to be discussed.

His timing was excellent.....for All Saints Church traditionally observed on All Saints' Day the display of the relics of the saints, and the people were accustomed to coming on that day as they might not have come at other times; in fact there are those who say that the attendance on All Saints' Day in All Saints Church in Wittenburg was the highest attendance figure for the entire year.

And when they came, they were given to understand that they could accrue so many credits, so much merit would be theirs, if so many prayers would be offered, ^{before} ~~FOR~~ this object, before that relic, of another saint. Against this, too, the struggling soul of the Augustinian friar was fighting.

Taking advantage of the number of people who might come, he posted his 95 propositions that he'd like to discuss.

So they came.....so they read.....so the world could know it. Today we remember this.

But I am in duty bound to remind you at once that the invitation of the Augustinian friar was not simply an invitation to debate - - it was not simply an invitation to discuss, but rather it was an invitation to discuss and to debate these things in the light of the Gospel, as we know it through Holy Scripture. When that Augustinian friar made that known, he established what is, in my mind at least, a basic principle of the Protestant Reformation....

...that the church must always try and prove herself by the Scriptures. Now we have written as the principle of the Reformation, the Holy Scriptures become the norm, the only rule, for faith and practice.

Now when this is not true, all kind of evil and error creep into the picture, for then we begin to rely upon man's judgment, man's reason, man's will - - what may seem right to him; not only to him, but to other people as well. A man may be inclined to listen to the clamor of many voices, and mistakenly permit himself to believe that the voice of people is the voice of God....and this can be gross error. The Reformers were exceedingly wise when they said the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone become the basis for our faith, for our practice.

When I first went to Rome, I, too, not simply as a conventional tourist, but for my appreciation for what the Church at Rome has done for all Christendom, and her witness for Christ in all parts of the world, and for the benefit that we had known through her years.....so I wanted to go to St. Peter's, what I consider the grandest of all churches in Christendom.

But I could not appreciate it to the fullest. My heart was not strangely warmed, it was disturbed, because I could remember as I read the history book that once upon a time there were people who were invited to bring their offerings, their coins, the silver and the gold, that the walls of the church could be erected - - - but this they did at the expense of the salvation of their souls...for when a man is asked to bring an offering and is led to believe that just in the bringing of the offering the gates of Heaven open wider for him, this is risky business. But this is the kind of error that can creep into a picture when men in the church do not cause all of their actions, all of their practices, to conform to the standard of sacred writ.

There are several of us in this place who, at an impressionable period in their lives, at the Laying on of Hands, ordained ministers of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Lutheran Church, and do you know that before that moment of Ordination we had to make a promise, and the promise was this, among other things - - that we would preach and teach the Word of God.

...and do you know that to this very day, that if any of you should come to this place, and as you listened attentively to the preaching of the Word you should find that I or any other man should declare anything that is not scripturally sound, scripturally true, you are in duty bound as a member of the church to confront the preacher with this, and if necessary, to bring formal charges - - so greatly does the Lutheran Church cherish the Holy Scriptures! - - so earnestly would she be guided by it!

I am not unmindful of the fact that today there are those who tell us that the Bible, the Scriptures - - they are passe, they belong to a generation that has come and gone, when life was simple, a society which was pastoral - - people who lived a long, long time ago, in a far away land.

They are quick to say - - "You mean to tell me that I must use the Scriptures as the only norm for faith and practice today! - - a book--a series of writings that knows nothing at all about the neutron bomb! a book that knows nothing about subways? missiles? rockets? the Jet Age? a book that might talk about bread, but not bread as we know it, for ours is bread that has preservatives to protect against spoilage, fortified with vitamin D! - - - do you mean to tell me that I must accept this as the only norm for faith and practice? - - "

Thanks be to the Reformers, that word only was wisely and well chosen,

and it remains there. We haven't the liberty to change it.

The problem may be in the way you understand the Scriptures.....

...you are in error if you think that you can turn automatically to the Scriptures on any given page and find an answer to any question that you might raise

...you are in error if you look upon the Scriptures as a textbook on science

...you may be concerned with the healing of diseases - - you are in error if you look upon the Scriptures as *Materia Medica*

.....and I suppose it can almost be established that you could be in error if you looked upon it simply as a history textbook!

The Scriptures constitute in a unique way God's revelation to us. And the most precious of all aspects of the Scriptures is this, as the blessed Reformers put it - - "It is the cradle for Christ." The Scriptures constitute God's unique revelation that leads us to Jesus Christ. In this sense then, the Scriptures become the only norm for faith and practice, because it brings us to Jesus Christ - - the Scriptures, through the faithful reading of them, create faith in us by which the Holy Spirit enables us to claim Christ as Saviour. This is how we must understand in the Protestant tradition the sacred writings, the Good Book, the Holy Bible.

It's not so much to bring to you a blue-print, a procedure by which you live your life at eight o'clock, nine o'clock - "do this at ten o'clock" - "do not do this at eleven"rather, it's a unique revelation of God by which we are encountered by Jesus Christ, and encounter is in the person of Christ. As we are encountered by Christ, then we know the will of God, then we are secured

of the way of salvation, then the promise of His pardon is guaranteed. This is it.

This is why the Reformers said, "The Scriptures and only the Scriptures become the norm for your faith and your practice because the Scriptures uniquely bring us to Jesus Christ. I beg of you as your Pastor.....that the Scriptures are this unique.....a revelation of God, as in no other way. (

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We are the people of the Book - - and the most heart-warming of all things to be seen in this new era between Roman Catholics and Protestants is this....

....not that we are simply sitting down at a table and talking together

....not that we should arrive at that moment in history when my Roman Catholic friend would look upon me as his brother--separated, though, but still his brother

...the most heart-warming of all things, it seems to me, is this:

- - that Roman Catholics and Protestants together are re-discovering the Bible!

This may be, that God has reserved for those of the Protestant tradition to hold it forth - - interpret it - - to see it as it was always meant to be, the Cradle of Christ. For he who does not see Christ in the Scriptures has not read the Scriptures aright. And he, who having read the Scriptures does not reflect in his life the spirit of Christ, has read the Scriptures in vain.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.
And he said unto them, When ye pray, say: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us - - "

- - now, that would be an excellent place to stop, wouldn't it?

Did you ever ask yourself the question, if as the preacher said the last time we dealt with this subject of the Lord's Prayer, that the petition for forgiveness is the most important single thing that a man can ever ask from God, then why go on and talk about anything else? - - if, as the preacher said the last time we talked about this subject, that this is the central core, this is the most important thing in the prayer itself, why not end it?

It's a question that deserves to be asked. For if, now, I have received the assurance of God that my sins are being forgiven, why wait around talking about anything else? - why wait around for any lesser blessing? If I have already received the most important thing that God can give, let me be on my way!

I have to remind you, however, that this prayer was taught by our Lord Jesus Christ; and the prayer for forgiveness is followed immediately with this next petition, and if you recall the words, there is that conjunction "and" - -

" - - forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those
who trespass against us - and - lead us not
into temptation - - "

....in the very same breath---in the very same thought....Jesus Christ goes on to talk about temptation. He hasn't the

slightest inclination to permit you and me to believe that once we have received forgiveness, that everything, now, is signed, sealed and delivered--there is nothing more to be said.

Sometimes when a preacher goes to the pulpit you may be inclined to think that he doesn't know anything at all about the subject to which he invites your attention. And by the same token, sometimes when the preacher comes to the sacred desk, he may likewise think that you don't know anything at all about the subject to which he invites your attention. While either of these or both of them might be true at any other time, neither one is true right now. I happen to know a great deal about this subject, and I have reason to believe that you know a great deal about it, too. For temptation is something that is common to every man.

Our Blessed Lord did not escape it. When He was here on earth, you may remember, after that exceedingly wonderful experience of the baptism--after the declaration had been made--"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" - - - what's the next episode in the life of our Lord?

"Then was he led by the spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted of the devil - - "

...temptation is an experience common to every man, and our Lord knows it - - and that's why He who chose the words for this prayer that serves as a pattern, immediately includes this whole subject of temptation.

It's our basic theology that the human heart, left to itself, always finds it's easier to do sin--the human heart, left to itself, always finds evil more attractive than good. And God, who knows the facts of life, God, who knows human nature, says to us when we pray that we have no right to get up from our knees until we've talked about this matter of temptation.

Now when you begin to look at these words, these words that fall from our lips so easily when we pray...when you begin to examine them, they raise all kinds of questions, and all kinds of perplexing problems, to wit:

...does God lead a man into temptation?

...and if you can think that temptation is to "incite to sin" - - does God traffic in this kind of business?

....or if you want the complete reversal, if temptation means testing and trial, and if temptation is a necessary experience in life, else choice would have no meaning - - what does it mean, then, if given the chance to do evil, I prefer good? if given the chance to do good, I prefer evil? - - what meaning can there be to choice? If temptation, then gives me the test and the trial - - if temptation, then can be called a good thing, why, then, does a man pray, "Keep me from it - - keep me from it!"?

These are the questions that may come to your mind when you start dealing with this subject, and perhaps there are moments when we raise more questions than we can answer in any one sermon. Suffice to say for the moment, that in the Bible itself sometimes the word temptation means an invitation to incite to sin.

There are times when that word temptation means to be put to the test, to be exposed to a trial. Some of you may remember what I have told you before, how in the home in which I grew up my father continued to have, here and there, somewhere in the room, an object of life, daily life, in the Near East, by the shores of the Mediterranean. There is one object that I remember, and he still has it---for want of a better name we youngsters used to call it an Oriental drum. It's about 12-18 inches in height, it's made out of clay. The two ends are about 8-10 inches in diameter. The one end is covered with the skin of an animal, and against this, of course, the Oriental would thump out his melody.

When I would look at that skin that served as a covering for this Oriental drum, I would occasionally remember what the Orientals used as the word for stretch - - sometimes it was the same word that's found in the Bible for temptthe Oriental craftsmen would take the skin and he would stretch it and pull it---because he wanted to tear it? of course not! - - because he wanted to see what pressures it could withstand! - to discover how strong it would be, how weak it could be. This, too, you may understand as the meaning of temptation---that one might discover strength...weakness.

And somewhere along the line in this whole process it's given to man to understand that he can't possibly withstand all the forces of the Evil One in his own strength. God never made any man big enough to stand up to the Devil - - all by himself.....and that's why, to this one person at least, I can't possibly say to myself "lead us not into temptation" is the prayer of a coward - - it's the prayer of a very honest man, who knows that he could fail, who knows that he could succumb, but his love for God is so great that he doesn't want to....whose appraisal of his own soul is realistic enough to know that without God he cannot succeed.

The old church fathers, whenever they thought of temptation, divided it into three groups, and the rest of this sermon is a consideration of those three groups. They admitted that temptation is an experience common to every man, and of all the temptations that a man might know, they could be classified in three different areas.

One group....the temptations that come to a man from within--down deep inside his own heart. Always, wherever a man may go, he takes himself, and again I say to you, it's our basic theology that the human heart is stained in sin, and because this is true, you and I may be forgiven. We are the pardoned ones, but we remain the pardoned sinnere, and until the very day that you and I die there

will always be swelling up from within us a willingness, in one degree or another, to prefer evil. The old church fathers said, whenever you talk about temptation, be sure to talk about the temptation that comes from within a man - - his own inclination to do evil. This is why our Lord, in this pattern for praying, allows us to know that we can be forgiven, but as soon as we are forgiven we remain the sinners:

Walter Luthi, the German scholar, has written a very interesting book on the Lord's Prayer, and at this point he mentions a very interesting example--- crude, perhaps, but still interesting.....he said this whole matter of being forgiven and then being exposed to the opportunity to sin immediately is like a man who trims his nails or has his hair cut, and as soon as the process of trimming has been completed, the process of growth anew begins all over! If that were not so, why do you suppose we Lutherans begin our worship the same way Sunday after Sunday?--you and I have received the glorious assurance that our sins are forgiven, in the opening liturgy of the church, and you have peace...but next Sunday ---seven days have elapsed...we come back and we begin all over again. The old church fathers were wise when they said, always remember there is this grouping of temptation that arise from within.

Now when I read for you what someone has depicted, this inclination on my part to do evil--will you find his words alien to your heart? This is the way he puts it:

"The perils that we well might shun,
We wander forth to meet;
The path into the road of sin,
We tread with careless feet;
When our hands should bar the gate,
We parley with the foe;
The ill we deemed we ne'er could do,
In thought we dramatize;
What we should loathe, we learn to scan,
With speculative eye;

Alas for ignorance profound,
And our poor nature's bent;
The weakened sympathy with wrong,
Becomes the will's consent."

...If this isn't the picture of your soul, take my word for it, it's good imagery of my own heart! The old church fathers were wise when they said that one grouping of temptations begin from within a man.

And then they also said there's a second grouping. And that grouping of temptations comes---they had no other word or way of expressing it but for this: it comes from without...the environment, the circumstance, the occasion or the situation in which a man finds himself, which creates the opportunity, which tempts him. With all the ardor of my soul I say to those, my young friends, take heed to these words, for there is a kind of friend, there is a kind of situation in which you could find yourself, which you yourself might choose, wherein you find it a lot easier to do evil than to do good. The very nature of the person with whom you associate, the very place in which you might go, creates the situation. The church fathers knew what they were talking about when they said the temptations that come to a man from without, the opportunity which is created by the situation, the occasion or the circumstance....and there are some of us who might never have sinned had we not allowed ourselves to go the place where it was easier to sin.

And the third grouping, and this may interest you, is not common talk any more, but it's Biblically sound and Biblically true - - - they said the third grouping of temptations come from below

within - without - below

...and this was their way of

saying - by the Devil. The sheer force of

evil itself is personified by the Devil. We who are so intelligent, we who are so sophisticated, have written off the Devil quite often, refused to believe that such an evil exists.

I must remind you that when our Lord was here on earth He was without sin, He could not be tempted from within.....and during the experience in the wilderness He was removed from people....

...it was the Devil himself who made the direct onslaught against Christ. And sometimes you and I have no other way of expressing the fact that we succumb to temptation except it is the very force of the Evil One, the Diabolical One, the Slanderer - - use any name you wish - - who would possess us.

I stand before you as one who with all my heart would remind you that you and I are incapable of standing against the Devil by ourselves. But I would remind you with all the joy that my soul can know, that God is able to bring us the victory.

So, for me, then, when I pray this prayer, it means this....

"God, don't allow me to go into temptation without you!

"God, make me strong!

"God, help me! "

A man ought to be aware of two things:

...he will never escape the possibility of temptation

...and he can never possibly overcome it except by the
grace and strength of God!

* * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"DELIVER US FROM EVIL"

The Sunday School hymns taught to us in the days of our childhood remain as haunting melodies in the heart, and every now and then I remember the one we used to sing---"I think when I read that sweet story of old, when Jesus was here among men - - "and then you remember how it goes--how we wish that we might have been there then.

So I recall His days on earth, and I say to myself, suppose I could have been there---not everyone was present every time, and I would have been given limited opportunity---nema the times, now, when I would like most to have been present. Without any hesitation I tell you, I surely would have liked to have been there when that very wise disciple came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray".

For whatever else you may say about the Master, He was the perfect personality. People who cannot call Him Lord and Saviour admit that no one ever quite lived the way He lived - - never caught off-guard, never unduly irritated ---always equal to any occasion. And the disciples were wise enough to admit that as they had walked with Him and talked with Him and lived with Him, that there was somewhere a secret for all of this, and from their human evaluation it might have occurred to one disciple at least that this must have been it - -
- - He was a man of prayer.....

...He was able to give what He gave because He had first
received

...He preached as He preached because He first heard the
voice of God

...He lived as He lived because He knew what it was to tap
the infinite resources of the heart of God himself.

I would like to have been there when He said,

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive
those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation - - "

...and I suppose they waited, now, to hear how He would end the prayer. For it must have occurred to them that He was about to bring the prayer to a close.

We talk about the famous first words - - we enter a room...we wait

in someone's presence, wondering just what it is that he might

say first. We have a way of remembering famous first words - -

...just so, we have a way of never forgetting famous last words...the

last thing we heard a person say remains quite fresh

...and there are those who when they are about to build a case,

if they're going to have a limited time with someone, they

anticipate what they're going to say, not only how they're

going to say it, but when they're going to say it...and

there are those who leave their desired impact for the

very end - -

...it could be that way with some people and God - - not that they think

that God has a short memory, but from their standpoint at least...

"Now, after I've said everything to you, God, this is the last

thing that I'm going to say."

Now from a human point of view our Lord gave the model prayer..

"After this manner therefore pray ye - - ".

The prayer consists of seven petitions. The petition that we consider now is

the last of the seven - - "Deliver us from evil."

Upon sober reflection I say to you quite candidly, it's not a very pleasant thought, is it? Is this the point at which we have to end in the conversation with God? Come now, is it really as bad as all this?---that no matter what else we have said, when we come to this and we have to turn back and say to God - - "And by the way, God, deliver us - -

You do this for us because no one else can - - "

...is this the sad sorrowful plight of man?

Well, there are those who when they think of this prayer have but one of two reactions: one, man is forever the distressed. Name any hour in man's life and you will find some element of despair. And in his relationship with God he's invariably found upon his knees - -

"Lord help! ...Lord, save! ...Lord, deliver!"

...this is the cry of the distressed, this is the cry of despair.

And the more you think about it down deep inside your heart, there's something that rabele---to think that this is the end with which I must always deal! Come now, where's all this wonderful dream that you preachers share with people, that if only a man gives his life to God, then from that moment on everything has a way of working out just right. This is why some people have their moments, when they're tempted to turn their back upon God! They've come with such wonderful high hopes---they keep repeating for themselves that precious passages of Scripture---"All things work together for good to them that love the Lord"...and they have a way of reading into that verses of Scripture what they delight in reading into it - -

"Everything will be all right now, God - - I'm shielded,

I'm protected - - the Eternal God is my refuge, and

underneath will always be the everlasting arms!"and

by that they mean...

"Ten thousand shall fall at my right hand, but it's not
going to come near me!

Jesus was forever the realist, and He forever acknowledged the fact of evil. And I know, I can't minister to you for the length of years that I have without knowing, what happens down deep inside your heart, when constrained by the truth of God I tell you certain things. Some of you did not react favorably when I told you once in a sermon that you and I are sinners to the very day we die. You didn't want to hear it, that even though now you have claimed the love of God in Christ, that to the very end, there will always be somewhere, somehow, looming upon the horizon, the Devil himself. You'll never have done with it, for the facts of evil remain.

Jesus knew this. That's why when He chose the words in the prayer for us He said, "You can end your prayer this way....."and you know, don't you, that in the original translation this is where the prayer ends. This is the last part in the Lord's Prayer. The scripition, the doxology--"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory" - - is something that the early church is supposed to have added on. Maybe it indicates on their part that they just didn't want to end on a despondent, discouraging note, that this is what man is, even to the end....but somehow there had to be the element of the triumphant. And so they added the doxology.

Well, the first reaction to this petition is exactly as it ought to be - - it is the prayer of the distressed, it is the cry of despair.....always, everywhere, the fact of evil.

On the other hand, there are those who say very quickly - - but it's more than that! It's the prayer of hope. It may be the prayer of the helpless,

but it's the prayer of the hopeful - -

"Lord, You deliver us from evil!"

...the acknowledgment of the fact that God is able to do what we cannot do for ourselves. This is the other side of the coin.

My heart leaps up, now, at the thought that in my time of despair, I, the distressed one, can cry out in confidence and in assurance that God will deliver me. A man is incapable, absolutely incapable, of freeing himself from the power of Satan. I am fully aware of the fact that when the church was young this prayer might have meant a great deal more to them than it does to us. For, you see, they did live in an evil day. And when they talked about the evil days they remembered the hand of the tyrant---they were forever the oppressed, they were forever the persecuted, and they knew what it was, with their backs against the wall, to cry out - -

"O God, in our misery, deliver us! - - Free us
from this present world!"

But you and I don't live in that kind of a world. On occasion I have been humbled to the very ground when I have been in the presence of those who were in concentration camps two decades ago. It wasn't so much what they told me---sometimes they spoke very little about it....it was what you felt. For they had nothing but torture, day by day, and for many of them, the prospect of certain, agonizing death. I can understand how they would pray: this prayer---in confident and certain faith--"O God, deliver us from this evil world! - - free me now from this miserable existence".....for, you see, the tyrant was the very personification of the Devil, and he seemed to be in full control. This I can understand,

But I can also understand that it's quite difficult for you and me to

appreciate this prayer for deliverence because you and I have a way, now, in peace and prosperity, of becoming very much attached to this world. Granted a man has health, and a certain measure of financial security, and a measure of vigor - - why should he want to go anywhere else? From what is it that he wants to be delivered in this present world?

Therefore we must always remember that what we are being taught in this prayer is that we're to be delivered from the very force of evil itself - -

"Lord, save me! - Lord, deliver me! - Lord, have mercy!"

....Who am I? I am a sinner. The devil's clutch upon my soul can be very firm. I cannot free myself.

It's always a difficult thing to ascertain just how seriously another man may take his religion. It's not given for us to judge. But this I can say to you, each one of us ought to learn to take his religion seriously.

And when I begin to take my own religion seriously, I come to the place where I must admit that in the time of Judgment, it's either Heaven, or it's Hell.

There is a line. And when I take my religion that seriously, it's a whole lot easier to pray this prayer - - for I have nothing else to say. There's no better choice of words - - the stark reality of the fact remains....

...."Lord, deliver me from evil!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Thy Hand, O God, is always outstretched toward us, and from it we take what it is that we need most, for Thou dost supply our every need.

But in this moment before Thee now we would see Thy hand outstretched, waiting to receive, to take what we now are, and what we bring to this altar we bring in Thy Name, for the extension of Thy Kingdom throughout the world.

Prosper Thou every good thing that may come into existence because of what we offer Thee now.

Heavenly Father, look upon us favorably. Give us wisdom, give us patience, give us courage, give us pardon, that we shall be delivered from all evil.

Heavenly Father, there are those who wait before Thee now whose need is very great. They make known to Thee what they will not make known to anyone else. As they go from this holy place, may they carry in their hearts something that they did not have before they came, something that, once they go, they shall not lose.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven.....

(Prayer offered by Pastor Shahaen following sermon "Deliver Us From Evil")

"THE POWER, THE KINGDOM, THE GLORY"

Only one more sermon remains in this series based upon the general theme of the Lord's Prayer, and the sermon next Sunday, even as the sermon today, deals with a part of the Lord's Prayer which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not teach us. You may remember that last Sunday we concluded the prayer, the prayer that Christ Himself chose as the words as He put them into the mouth of the disciples; and the Lord's Prayer, properly, as originally given, I dare say, ended with the petition "Deliver us from evil."

We must always remember that the one who taught the prayer was divine. And He was giving the lesson to human beings. And I'm inclined to think that after He had taught them to pray, human as they were, they must have had some doubt and some misgivings...

...could they honestly believe, under any given circumstance,
that God in Heaven would have a Father's interest in them?
...could they honestly believe, that under any given circumstance, they should do God's will?

...could they honestly believe that under any given circumstance, no matter how hungry they might be, that God would always supply bread? - - that they would always, if they had to depend upon Him, have enough to eat?
...could they always believe, under any given circumstance, that His Kingdom would come? that things could be done down here on earth in much the same manner, if not in the same spirit, as they're done in Heaven above?

....surely they must have raised these questions over so often.

What, now, do you think they thought of this prayer when they heard about

the thing that happened on Calvary's cruel hill? - - is this what happens to a man who prays "Thy will be done"? - - is this the way it's going to end?surely, human as they were, they must have asked this kind of question. And they went on asking the question for a long, long time. And they got their answer.....

...after a while they finally believed that God is to be trusted
...after a while, after they had tested, in the crucible of their own experience, they were forced to conclude that God would always have a Father's interest in them
...and that even though they might not be able to understand it, and even though they might not be able to get some visible token of proof that they could recognize, yet they were to go on praying, "God, let Your will be done."

And after they had prayed this prayer for almost one hundred and fifty years, then they went on to add something to it. The last thing that Jesus said when He taught them how to pray was "Deliver us from evil"...and after praying this prayer for a century and a half, the early church said, we can't end there...we want to add something to the prayer.....and you know, don't you, that this final part of the Lord's Prayer we refer to as the Doxology---

"For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory"

--is man's echoing voice to God - - this is something that we've added. They just couldn't think of asking God, and asking God, and asking God - - and then stop on that note.

Man is essentially a beggar, as you well know. We always go through life reaching for this, asking for that, begging for something else...always hoping

that something that we have yet to get could be ours. Man is essentially the beggar, and as you know, Jesus Christ established that role in our minds when He gave us the pattern for praying---He gave us opportunity to name seven things in particular. And when we talk about the Lord's Prayer in Catechetical class we always talk about the petitions in the prayer---the asking for this thing and the asking for that, because God knows that this is essentially what man is -- a begger -- asking -- wanting.

But man was never meant to remain a beggar forever. He has a more glorious role in life than the beggar's role. He is able to thank God, he is able to praise God, and this was written in the very experience of the early church itself. And after a century and a half, two centuries, they added the concluding part of the prayer as we know it now.

And let me tell you two things about it.

First of all, it's their endorsement to this prayer. After they had prayed it for these years, they wanted to declare, in no uncertain way, that the Kingdom is God's, the Power and the Glory belong to Him, He can be trusted, He can be believed -- you can take Him at His word.

It's an amazing thing to know that they agreed upon this in the kind of world in which they happened to live. To this very day you can go into those countries that border on the Mediterranean and you can find some evidence of their day of persecution. To be a Christian was to be a Christian at a great risk and peril. If a man took the name of Jesus Christ and refused to bow before the Emperor, he could be annihilated immediately. They were driven underground, they couldn't gather together publicly for an assembly of worship. And yet they went on believing that God could be trusted....and out of their own experience they fashioned these words -- "The Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory belong to God."

You see, it's never really enough to take at face value what somebody else tells you. Every now and then, God says you must prove it for yourself, in your own experience - - "You have to come back and tell Me that what you've been taught is true" - - so Jesus, in the pattern for praying, told them that God is their Father.....

...He told them that they should pray that His
will should be done

....He told them that they could pray that they'd
get daily bread

...He told them that they could pray that God's
Kingdom would appear

....now it was left for them to prove it, to find it out for themselves. And this they most certainly discovered as they went on believing, and so they added these words as their endorsement - - "This we know from our own hearts to be true."

I frequently ask myself, as a pastor, - - if I should sit with the members of this congregation, one at a time, and ask them to tell me in their own words what they most certainly believe about God - - I wonder how clear and salutary their expression of faith would be. I did this once with a group of preachers. I was conducting a retreat for them, up in New York State--there were about twenty-five in the group....and one day I said....

"Why don't we spend the next two and one-half hours,
each man in the quiet of some corner of this building,
with a piece of paper and a pencil in his hand...and
then you write down for yourself what you know to be
true about God--the testimony of your own soul. Try

not to rely upon the words of others. Let this be the Gospel according to you. Let this be the valid testimony of your own mind, of your own spirit."

Try it sometime. And then you'll know just how much faith you may have!

Whether you want to believe this or not, it's entirely up to you, but there's a school of thought that maintains that unless you can say it, you really don't know it. That's why, every now and then, the beloved waits for her lover to put into words what she thinks he knows in his heart to be true. It has to be said. That's the way it was with the early church. In the crucible of their own experience, they believed they had found it to be true, that God is to be trusted, that the Kingdom does belong to Him. Nero, - - Domitian - - they had but a day. God has eternity.

So after they had prayed this prayer for a number of years, they had to endorse it, and every time you and I pray it we are using their words, and we ought to catch the echo and the re-echo of their spirits as they say to us - - "Go on! Pray the prayer and believe it - - what Jesus Christ says about God is true - - we know! we're telling you that the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory belong to God - - we know!"

The second thing to be said about this doxology, this closing part of the prayer, is that it's an ascription of praise.

I have come to believe that if no one ever went to the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, even if we never used it - -

...and incidentally, it's used a great deal. At almost any given hour of the day we have been able to find someone there, on certain days of the week. It was used this morning, even before you came, by just a handful of people

who laid bare their souls to God, asking that when you would come, you might breathe something of the very nearness of God, and that God might speak to the deep needs of your soul....

- - and I'm inclined to believe that if no one ever went to the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, the very fact that it has the name that it has would be a witness in itself that you and I, when we think of God, ought to think of Him gratefully, and declare His praise. Even the very name is a witness of something exceedingly wonderful.

Sometimes I ask you to bring me back the bulletins from the churches that you visit when you're on holiday. A number of them come from congregations that are not Lutheran in their practice. And my heart is warmed when, on occasion, I have scanned the bulletin that you have brought back, and I've seen that another congregation has listed a special service in the order of the day, a special service that's called a Service of Praise - thanksgiving. Then I look to see what happens in that service. They have the singing of certain hymns, they announce the Scripture that's to be read, and when I check the Scripture for myself I found that each passage of Scripture was a Scripture that talked about how wonderful God is. And I suppose that if they wanted to, according to the practice of the congregation, it could be that there would be those in the congregation who would stand up, as the pastor would invite them, and each one in his own way, publicly, informally, would ascribe his praise to God - - the joy that the redeemed know. That whole service would be given over completely to praise and thanksgiving.

Whenever you pray the Lord's Prayer, and you come to this final part, that's exactly what you're doing. After you've asked God for any one of s

number of things, you end by saying God is to be praised, His Kingdom is without an end, the Power and the Glory belong to Him. Praise ought always to be a part of every prayer.

On occasion we've talked about the great similarity between religion and love. And this is right and this is proper. When you reflect upon any letter that you might have received from your loved one, what you properly refer to as a true love letter, the greater part of that letter, if you reflect upon it now, was given to telling the person that you love how wonderful you think that person is - - how indispensable you think that person is to you, and that if something should happen that that love should be taken away, then there would no longer be a spring in your step, no longer a light in your eye, no longer a song in your heart. Love always becomes articulate. It does give expression to what it knows to be true in the heart and the mind and the spirit of the person that's loved. So we, my friends, when we come to pray, instinctively tell God how wonderful He is, or we have not prayed aright.

As some of you know, there are few services in the course of the year that mean more to me personally than the three-hour devotion on Good Friday. I anticipate a number of things each time Good Friday comes around. But there is the one point in the service for which I long more than anything else. It happens after the preacher has spoken to us about the Seven Words from the Cross...it happens after we've prayed all of our prayers, after we've sung all of our hymns, after we've read all of the Scripture....and just before the benediction, the officiating minister will say--remembering, now, how we've thought about the crucifixion - - the officiating minister quotes:

"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Alleluia!

Blessing and Power and Glory and Dominion be
unto our God forever and ever and ever!"

Now, that's the way the Lord's Prayer ends. It's the way it had to end. People who pray it honestly believe it earnestly. And the last thing that they want to say into the very ear of God is this:

How wonderful you are, God!

How exceedingly wonderful!

This I know to be true.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AMEN"

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.
And he said unto them, When ye pray, say: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

This is the last in the series of sermons dealing with the Lord's Prayer. Let me say this to you at the very beginning - - that all men, everywhere, will pray. God has given to us a soul, and that soul was meant to turn to God. Instinctively he recognizes that there is someone greater than he. He may not be as fortunate as you and I to call him by His rightful name when he turns in the direction of God, he may not be able to see what you and I see since we've come to know Christ, the lines of love written upon the face of our Heavenly Father. And when he prays, he may not be able to use the right word, even as he may not know the character of the God to whom he prays.

But pray he will. This is the nature of man. And this is the kind of God we have, who made man with a soul.

And that's why I have reason to believe that throughout the world and in many parts of the United States folks who are not accustomed to going to church, people who did not pride themselves with being numbered in the ranks of the redeemed, may have exclaimed - - "My God! - - O God! - - It can't be!"
Man was made to think in terms of God.

But the sad thing is, not everyone knows how to pray right. And that's why it's to the everlasting credit of this one disciple in particular--he came and asked the question that every one of us must ask. We need to learn how to pray....

I tell you, it's natural for men to breathe, but just because it's natural, it doesn't follow that every man knows how to breathe correctly, how to breathe properly....

It's natural for men to be able to walk, and yet there are people who make perfectly good money, who make their living, teaching people how to walk properly and correctly....

It's natural for men to eat, and yet there are people who make money going across this country, teaching people how to eat their food properly.....

....man was made to pray. He must be taught how to pray properly.

And that's why this disciple, representing you and me, asked the right question of the right person - - "Lord, you teach us how to pray."

Now there are three things that have to be said about this prayer.

The first is this: that when the Master-teacher taught them how to pray He chose the words for them. And honestly now, it's like that. You and I really don't know what it is that we ought to talk about when we come into the Presence of God. And so Christ chooses the words for us. He tells us what it is that we ought to talk about---the things that we ought to desire, the things that God says we can afford to ask Him for.

Whenever you and I use this prayer, God forbid that we should use the prayer easily, casually, or with indifference. When the church was young--do you know what happened? They didn't even allow everybody to pray this prayer.

It was a prayer that was permitted to be used only by those who had come to know Jesus Christ, and who knew what it was to call God "Father" because He was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it was to be used only by those who had made commitment to the Kingdom. For the early church believed they had no right to pray about the Kingdom unless they knew that they had a vested interest in the Kingdom..

And they even devised a part of their liturgy, that when they prayed the prayer they had an introduction to it, in which they asked God to cleanse their hearts, that with true reverence they might pray the prayer aright. For you see, they were dealing with the words that came from the lips of Jesus Christ. Don't ever forget it! - - end of all the prayers that God our Father must hear, it could be that none could be more precious to His ears than this one, because this is the prayer that His Son taught us to pray.

Well, this is the first thing that you have got to remember in this last sermon - - that the words of this prayer, by and large, are the words that were chosen by Jesus Christ Himself. And one can never afford to take lightly the words of the Master-teacher.

The second thing: that as the church used this prayer, they felt constrained to add something to it, and as was said last Sunday, the doxology, the closing part of the prayer - - that was added by the early Christians. Now when you and I pray this prayer remember this very, very well, that we're also using the words of the devout, and the nobly committed - - we're using the words given to us by men and women who put the prayer to the test, and found that what Jesus said we should pray for was right and proper - - and that come wind or weather, God's will, His Kingdom to be here on earth as it is in Heaven, could become something of a reality in our lives.

I am constrained with all the order of my soul to remind you that when you use the words of this prayer you're using the words of Jesus Christ, and you're also using the words of people, who in the crucible of their own experience found this prayer to be true....that you and I can pray for God's will... ..that you and I can pray for forgiveness....that you and I can pray for the Kingdom to come.

Now the last thing to be said about this prayer.

Even though they may be the words of Jesus Christ, it's never enough for you and me to repeat them as such.

And even though "For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory" is the ascription of nobly committed Christians in the early church who put the prayer to the test - - even though we use their words it is never enough simply to use somebody else's words. And that leads to that very simple, almost insignificant-appearing word, that comes at the end of the prayer - Amen.

Now, whose word is that?

The greater part of the prayer, up to the doxology...the words of Jesus Christ....

"For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory,
forever and ever"the words of Christians who
put the prayer to the test centuries ago.

....But as soon as you say Amen, it becomes your personal signature...it becomes your personal assent....it is something that you are saying- - Amen is as personal as all that. And there comes a time in every man's life when he has to take the stand, and whenever you say Amen, you are involving yourself.

That word Amen is an important one. We'll use it almost a dozen times in this service. Mark you this well - - it was one of the first things that

you did as the service began....it will be the last thing that you do when the service ends...the Benediction is pronounced, and as though you want the whole world to know, you don't say it once, you say it three times - -

"Amen...

...let it be so

...listen to me, God - - I'm saying it."

The word Amen was also used by Jesus Christ - -

"Verily, verily.....Amen."

...it was His commitment....it was His endorsement...it was His identification.

The word Amen is not simply concluding a prayer. I warn you, it's a connecting link. After you've said what you've said, then you've offered to God the word Amen which becomes the connecting link between what you've said and what you're going to do. The word Amen takes you from your knees, and drives you out into the street. The word Amen may help you to turn your back upon God, only that you might see God in the need of your brother. The word Amen takes you away from the peace and the quiet of walls such as these, and takes you out into the arena where life can be cruel and tragic.

The word Amen drives us to our knees, when we haven't anything else to say, we say it - - "God, let it be so!"the earnest desire of our heartsand then God waits for us - - to identify ourselves with our prayer.

There's dynamite in the word! - - it means that you've gone on record

- - it means that once you've said "Amen", you have to live the prayer.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Yesterday afternoon several of us met in my office. We gave ourselves to such questions as these - - should we alter the services in Saint Luke Church on Sunday? It's the last Sunday in the church year. The bulletin has been printed, the hymns have been chosen, the sermon was in the process of preparation.....stunned, you see, as we were by the tragic blow that befell us as a nation and as a world, the day ought not to be ignored. After some discussion we resolved it in this way - - the only way in which it could be resolved - - the only way in which it ought to be resolved.

It is the procedure in the Lutheran Church that Sunday by Sunday the standard Order for Worship should be followed. There are Scripture lessons which are chosen in advance. It occurred to us, as I hope it has occurred to you, that every Sunday when you come to church you deal with the eternal verities. Every Sunday, when you come to church, our primary concern is of our relationship with God, and the meaning of redemption in Jesus Christ. To that end, every Sunday when you come we deal with the fact of preparation for the moment of death. We are always concerned with the tragic...and you have only to examine the liturgy of the church itself to see how, in all things, we recognize our dependance upon God - - in any moment, in any condition, in any circumstance.

So I can tell you this - - we are not altering the Order of Worship today. The hymns that we sing, except one, are the hymns that were chosen ten days ago. The sermon that will be preached is the sermon which I had planned to preach, if not in part, then in toto, during the past several weeks. There will be, however, a special prayer, and at the conclusion of the special prayer Chaplain Piper will announce to you the change in the last hymn.

But now let me speak as I ought to speak in this moment with you.

As your Pastor, as the shaphard and bishap of your soul, what can I say to you?

I can remind you of what I've already said---this church always deals with the eternal verities, the fact of life, the fact of death, the promise of life everlasting.

But we are a people. Some of you work on Capitol Hill. Some of you, one of you at least, has been most privileged to be part of an inner circle. Therefore we enter into this, not at a great distance---we're a little bit closer to it. Now we must look at it through the eyes of this, our Family in God.

We should remember that he was baptized in the Christian Faith.

We should remember him as one who was confirmed in the Christian Faith.

We should remember him, as the picture is given, of a man who marked the path to God's House on a Sunday morning, this was his habit. And when he went, he often desired not to go alone. And what ought to remain in your mind as an unforgattable thing is the picture of a man, going to God's House, tenderly clutching in his hand the hand of his daughter. I would ask that you remember that.

I would ask that you remember that in his young years he gave himself to noble causes, so that the world, in every ares, came to look upon him as a brother; and he concerned himself with the decadny of humanity, where every man should be seen as a human being, and never less than a human being.

I would remind you that the moment of death came to him suddenly. And in the moment of death we are either prepared, or we are not prepared. As it came to him, so it might come to us. How fortunate is the person who has come

to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and is made ready. So we are sobered by it.

I would remind you that our times and our seasons are in God's hands. God has a way of healing the wound. God has a way of thrusting duty in front of us. God has a way of asking us to rise to our full maturity, that despite all the implications, we shall be found faithful to him who is the Lord of all nations. So I speak to you on this Sunday.

I would remind you that tomorrow morning at nine o'clock there will be a special service in Saint Luke Church. The President of the United States has proclaimed tomorrow as a day of national mourning. He has suggested that we go to our places of worship. And that's why we are scheduling the hour tomorrow morning at nine o'clock.

We shall carefully choose the hymns. We shall use an Order especially recommended for a day such as that. We invite you to return.

Now, one final word, if you please. I think I am correct in assuming that the last formal proclamation made by President Kennedy was the proclamation concerning Thanksgiving Day, in which he himself was turning the thoughts of a nation toward God. I would remind you of that.

WE MARK THE PASSING from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As members together in the Household of God, let us pray:

We Thank Thee, O God, for those who are baptized, confirmed, who live their years in the knowledge of Thy saving Grace. We thank Thee for those who witness in Thy Name, in whatever vocation it may be that claims them.

May light perpetual shine upon his soul, and may his soul forever be in peace. Surround with the holy arm of love those who are near and dear; and teach us how to number our days and to apply our hearts unto wisdom, that when our last hour may come, no matter when nor how, we may know that we go to be with Thee and all whom we love in Heaven above. Amen.

"THE NECESSITY WHICH IS GRATITUDE"

The sermon on this day bears the title, "The Necessity Which is Gratitude"; and the text is from Romans, the first chapter, the 21st verses:

" - - for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened."

These words were written by an itinerant tent-mender. His name was Paul. He went hither and yon in Asia Minor, and wherever he went he did something more than just mend tents. Figuratively speaking, he kept his ear to the ground---he heard what people were saying - - he listened intently. He saw a great deal, and he put his finger, so it would seem, on the pulsebeat of all the people with whom he associated. And then at night, when he put his tent-mending equipment aside, he had long, deep, sober thoughts. These long, deep, sober thoughts are revealed in some of the letters that he wrote.

One of these letters was written to people who lived in the capital city of the world---the eternal city of Rome. And very early even in the very first chapter of the letter that he wrote he gave the people who got that letter that there was something wrong with the world. It was a sad world. It was not a happy world.

It was not a happy world because it was sick, and that sickness was the sickness of the soul. They were a people given to meaninglessness. They lived in an era of gross immorality. I'll tell you how bad the world was - - it was so bad that the first fifteen of the sixteen emperors of Rome lived lives openly in immorality. The world was so bad that it was not safe for any man who had any position of responsibility to walk the streets without danger of being molested. Execution was the order of the day. The world was so bad that an emperor's

wife would steal away under cover of darkness from the palace and spend the night in a brothel, and live willfully, so great was her lust, the life of a harlot. This is the kind of world in which the Apostle Paul lived.

And as he moved from community to community he said to himself, undoubtedly--

"It's a sick world - - it's a troubled world"

...and as he wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome he had no alternative, in his first chapter, but to talk to them about the wrath of God - - God was taking note of this immorality - - God was taking note of this sickness of the soul - - God was taking note of this meaninglessness.

And the Apostle Paul said, this is making God angry. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the kind of God who is not content to stand on the sidelines and see His world go to hell. God becomes infuriated when this happens....and God becomes infuriated, says the Apostle Paul, for the simple reason that this did not have to happen. The world does not have to be as troublesome as that---as sick as that.

And then somewhere in that first chapter the Apostle Paul says - - "and the reason is--not that they don't know anything about God - - the reason is that they know God, but they've forgotten Him.....and what is more, they no longer give Him honor, they no longer say 'thank you'."

Now, as far as the Apostle Paul's mind was concerned, there was a very definite relationship between a people who no longer thought in terms of God and honored Him and thanked Him - - and the corrupt force, the corrupt force of the immorality of the people followed because they were a people who no longer honored God, and who, when they thought of God, did not say "thank you".

Make no mistake about it, each of us at some time or another must recognize the truth that he is on the receiving end of life. All that is good comes to us.

It was the Apostle Paul who said it ever so eloquently somewhere in one of his writings - - "What have we that we have not received?" So wonderful is our God that His hand, outstretched to us, is never empty!

Katherine Mansfield took pride in the fact that she was an agnostic. She was even willing to be considered an atheist, an atheist of sorts, you see. And even she admits that when she went to Switzerland and drank in the beauty and the grandeur of those Alps, she looked around as though she had to say "thank you" - - but "thank you" to whom? Even the agnostic, even the atheist, will find himself in such a situation, where he's overwhelmed by the fact that here is something that he did not make--here is something that was given to him for sheer enjoyment--here is something that was given to him to use.

Now the tragedy, says Paul, it isn't that they didn't know God - - the tragedy is that having known God, they forgot Him...having known God, they never turned to Him and said "thank you, God - - thank you".

With all my heart I believe that the most miserable of all people is the ungrateful. And I'm inclined to submit to you that the person who becomes most corrupt, and the person who becomes most immoral, is not only the person who fails to acknowledge God, but the man who fails to thank Him, because once you thank God for something, you are in duty bound to recognize God's prior claim. For how can I abuse a gift? To mis-use a gift is downright sacrilege, for to mis-use a gift is to dishonor the person who gives it.

There is a close relationship. They lived senseless lives - - they are people of futility, says the Apostle Paul, because they no longer honor God, they no longer thank Him. I tell you this day, that gratitude is no luxury. Gratitude is a necessity. A man lives or dies because of gratitude or ingratitude, and that's why the mother is perfectly right when she schools and trains her child to say "thank you"; because if there's to be any kind of character at all, it's

character that's formed out of the basis of gratitude to someone or for something. This whole business of saying "thank you" is not simply a matter of being polite. It's a matter of being proper.

God took note of that, my friend. In Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed we are reminded that this is part of the work of the Holy Spirit -- to inspire in our hearts the acknowledgment of God -- to give thanks.

In the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, this quiet corner of prayer in God's House, there are a number of different symbols. And one exceedingly precious you see directly above the altar--it's carved into that beam. It's the symbol of a dove, and the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and it's the Holy Spirit that comes down into our hearts that prompts us to give gratitude to God. For we are never at our best until we say "thank you" -- never! With all my heart I believe God never smiles more favorably upon us than when He discovers us turning to Him and saying "thank you, God -- thank you!"

At this point I want to introduce into this sermon a member of this congregation. As you well know, having come to this pulpit as long as I have now, it's not my practice to talk about parishioners. But I am constrained to do this today. I shall not mention her name -- and even if I did, there are only about five of us in this entire congregation of aughteen hundred people who know her by name.....quiet, shy, modest. But I want to tell you several things about her. First of all, I am doing this because there was a kind of eavesdropping on my part, never intended to be that way. I was in my office...the Financial Secretary came to gather together for dedication today those Declarations of Intention, these pledge cards, being given by the people of this parish as an indication of their gratitude to God and as they express it through the support of Kingdom work through this congregation.

I heard her say as she picked up one envelope, something like this: "How

strange! I understand that she's moving away - I understand she's been ill". I happened to have been in the unique position of knowing that there was a pledge card there from this person. And I happened to be in a position to know that it was an increase over last year.

Now why do I tell you this?

For this one woman in particular, to be grateful is a fact of life, necessarily so. Now let me fill you in with the background.

.....She has been widowed. She has been divorced. Her life is terribly, terribly lonely. This could cause a person to become sour.

.....She's had surgery, major surgery that took her almost to the very door of death. She has recovered to a degree, but not enough, now, to go back again and do a full day's work. She's been forced to take an early retirement. She's been forced to give up her apartment. She'll go hundreds of miles away, to live with somebody else. This, too, could cause her to become sour. It is not easy to give up a measure of independence.

.....I must tell you that she came to our shores from across the waters. She came from a land where the tyrant had been in control. He had taken away freedom. Her loved ones had been put to death in a concentration camp.

.....I must tell you this---she has been known to wait for two hours, either for a cab that did not come, or for a bus that was behind schedule, in order that she might come and worship in Saint Luke Church

Now all of these things could have been conditioning factors which could have caused her to become sour, to become ungrateful. But she's sensible to

know that the one thing that she cannot afford is ingratitude. For ingratitude is like the cancer of the soul - - it keeps eating away at a man's heart, and deterioration continues until there is the death of the spirit itself. Ingratitude is one thing that you cannot afford to allow to possess your mind and your spirit.

I have still been unable to rid my mind from the events of the past week.

The man who assassinated the President of the United States of America, whatever else you may say of him, you'll have to include the fact that he was ungrateful - - ungrateful for America....he was the kind of person who could have turned his back upon this land of freedom....he was the kind of person who was not grateful for the fact that even his country was willing, once he had indicated that frame of mind of his - - this country was willing to let him come back! And I shudder for his soul when I think that this is what a man can do when he's ungrateful.

Said the Apostle Paul - -

"It's a sad and sick world - -" (I'm paraphrasing it)

"There's meaninglessness - - there's futility.

And the reason? - - There are people who have
forgotten to say 'thank you' to God."

.....and with all my heart and soul I believe that Hell - - - Hell is peopled
by the ungrateful!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

JESUS IS COMING: ALREADY?

- The Christ Who Came -

Let me say this word to you before the presching of the sermon. We are fortunate to belong to a church that traditionally sets aside the four weeks before Christmas as a time of true spiritual preparation. What with all the hustle and the bustle of the feverish life of which we are a part, it could be that the Christian should fail to appreciate the meaning of Christmas. And with all the ardor of my soul I suggest to you that you make as a daily prayer, even memorizing the words, the next-to-the-last stanza of the hymn that we've just sung:

"Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
Make thee a bed, soft undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for thee."

The text for today's sermon is written as the 10th and the 11th verses of the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

It was that great moment in the life of the Apostles, when, drawn by their blessed Lord, they had gone with Him to the mountain top. Now He was to return to heaven. No longer would they walk familiar paths, no longer would they do the things that they had been accustomed to do. Now He was going up into heaven.

Understandably so, they stood there motionless. They kept gazing, gazing at Him, and their eyes were toward the future. For you see, He told them that He would come again, and these were the words ringing in their ear. This is

what God wanted them to know: He will come---He will come again. And the theme song of the Christian can well be this, again and ever so often...

"Jesus is coming!

Jesus is coming!

Jesus is coming!"

And while they stood there, motionless, God Himself saw fit to send two of His representatives, as though they were to come and to shake these disciples, and to say "Now, be on with it! Go back to your day's work!

Go back to the town from which you came!

Let the shepherd go to his flock, let the

cabinetmaker go to his shop, let the store-

keeper go to his counting. Go back! Be off!

And remember this - - that this same Jesus that you
saw go to heaven is going to come again!"

...and I think there must have been a peculiar accent when these messengers of God said " - - but this same Jesus" ---this same Jesusand methinks that as soon as they said "this same Jesus" the disciples also automatically turned their thoughts backward to the Christ who had come, to the Christ who did live here on earth.....and very properly then, they found it in its true perspective, that whatever you think of Jesus Christ, you are in duty bound to think of Him not only as the one who is yet to come, but you must think of Him as the one who already came. For the Christ who returns is the Christ who has been here.

During Advent naturally we think about the coming of Jesus Christ, and each of these sermons to be preached on these four Sundays before Christmas has the same theme: "Jesus is Coming"; but today I am constrained to remind you, when you think of the coming of Jesus Christ, His return, you must remem-

ber Him as the Christ who has already come.

When God made man, God made him with a very happy faculty of being able to look backward and to look forward -- being able to remember...being able to anticipate; and only as he exercises this faculty is he able to appreciate the meaning of the present moment. You and I are good witnesses for Jesus Christ only as we remember Him as He once came, and only as we think of Him in His returning. And you can't think of one at the expense of the other!

There are people who do themselves a disservice and the world an injustice when they talk only about the Christ who is to come, when they talk about the second coming at the expense of that moment in history when the meaning of Incarnation was lived out here in this sorry world of ours. So it seems to me that these angels came and prodded the disciples and said "You look for Him to come again, but remember He's the same Jesus who was already here---think of Him as the one who came when you think of Him as the one who is yet to return."

As some of you know, these past two months have been a kind of preparation for me, in anticipation of a visit that's to be made to India at the end of the year. It will not be an easy assignment. Perhaps prior to my departure I can tell you more about it. But until that time, I have been charged to recognize the truth, that much of the responsibility that rests upon us who constitute the two-man team will be to go to some people who have yet to hear about Jesus Christ---not simply to minister to people who are already Christians. And while a great burden rests upon us to deepen the lives, by the grace of God, spiritually, of those who serve as the leadership of the church, yet there will be those opportunities when I shall be confronted, as will my colleague, with certain people who have yet to hear for the first time about Jesus Christ. And I know full well, I will serve no purpose if I begin to tell them about

somebody who has yet to come. I shall not begin at that point--by talking about the second coming. I will have to begin by telling them about the Christ who did come - - the Christ who is already here!

I am reminded of what I think I can share with you as gospel truth. I can't tell you who said it, and I can't tell you the people involved, and I can't even tell you where I first read it or heard it, but I accept it without hesitation, without reservation.....someone had the good fortune to go for the first time to a people, pagan as they were, who had never heard the story of Jesus Christ. And so the missionary went, and the people responded, and the missionary held them in the hollow of his hand, mark you, as he told them about the wonderful God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He began by saying how God mada the world, and then he went on to say how God had a continuing interest in this world---that once having made it, God didn't turn His back upon the world, but God kept watching over it.....and every now and then God would send someone especially---like a prophet---like a judge---like a patriarch---like a priest---like a king.....a constant reminder that God loves His world, that God cares about this world.

...and then the missionary went on to say that there was that moment in time and in history when God came Himself - - - when God chose a maiden pure, God chose a devoted husband, and He came in the form of a Baby---born in Bethlehem.....and how that Child grew up into manhood, and how, then, He was let loose in the world, that world of Judee and Galilee, and He went from place to place, performing miracles....and then how He'd sit down sometimes with two people, sometimes with five---sometimes with a multitude of five thousand....and He gave them word pictures, and when He finished speaking, they put their finger to their lips and reverently whispered the name GOD.

...the missionary went on to say how wherever He went, He went giving people God. And then one day they killed Him. And all this because He loved people!--and all

because God wasn't willing to keep back anything from people whom He loved.

....then the missionary also continued by saying that because God is God, the least word I have to tell you isn't that He died in a grave - - - He arose from the dead! - - He's triumphant! - - He's the Saviour who lives forever and ever! He is your God, and He came to save you - - you!

....and then we're told that one of this company of pagans stepped forth, and he said - - "You mean this is true?"

And the missionary said "Yess - - it's so true that I'm here, and I couldn't be here if it were not true!"

And the pagan said, "Well now, this makes all the difference in the world!"

...and then he asked a very searching question---if only

the pagan could have stopped at that point!

....but the pagan said, "And when did you say He came? - - when did God do all of this?"

The missionary said, "Oh, about two thousand years ago."

And we're told then the pagan said, "That long ago!

Why didn't I know this before?

Why didn't somebody else tell us?"

I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to enlist your aid once more in the cause of world missions, I have not come primarily to have you lift your eyes beyond our own horizons - - - important as this may be and as I hope I do with all witnessing, that you might know that Jesus Christ isn't meant for you and for me alone, that we of the West have no monopoly on Jesus Christ, nor anyone who is born of the Judeo-Christian religion or tradition--this you ought to know.....but I use this as an illustration for the simple truth that here was a man who said that "if this is true, then this makes all the difference in the world---if God once came to this world in Jesus Christ as you

say, this makes all the difference!"

....for you see, that pagan could never again be the same,
once he knew that this happened.

So I say to you with all the order of my soul - -

He came - - this God in Jesus Christ - - it has happened - -

it did take place

He did suffer - - He did die

He arose from the dead - - He lives triumphantly,
victoriously

It's not something yet to occur - - it's already happened.

...and this for you, as for me, should make all the difference in the world.

In vain it could be---listen carefully---in vain it could be that you look
for a Christ to come---if having already been told the story that He came, you
do not appreciate it to the full. Whenever you talk about the coming of Jesus
Christ, remember you're talking about the return of someone who was here al-
ready. You don't have to go to hell - - you've heard me tell you that before
....the deed, the wonderful deed of God has already been accomplished---salva-
tion for you and for me has already been signed, sealed and delivered. It
needs only to be accepted.

....how, then, can I look upon any man as anything less than a child
of God, when I remember that God already came to this earth, to
suffer and to die for that person?

....how, then, can I look upon my own life without any meaning, with-
out any purpose, when I remember that God in Christ has already
come, already has suffered and died for me! --that I should be
redeemed!

....how, then, can I look upon this world of which I am part and allow

it to think that it can be sold out to violence and wickedness--when I remember that God in Christ already suffered and died, that the world should be redeemed?

The theme of Advent is: "Jesus is coming!

Jesus is coming!

Jesus is coming!"

....and on this first Sunday in Advent I remind you that that Jesus who is coming is the same Jesus who is already here. And I think when, God granted, that moment may come when I shall see Him as He returns, that by the grace of our Heavenly Father I shall not have disabused the glorious truth of the fact that He has already been here. When He comes again, how much more blessed shall we be, because we are the ones who have had the benefit, the knowledge, the saving grace, that He has already been here.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

JESUS IS COMING: NOW?

- The Christ Who Comes -

Did you notice what Phillips Brooks has done in the hymn we've just sung? In poetic imagery he uses four stanzas to talk about the coming of Jesus Christ. Two of those stanzas relate to the fact that Jesus did come-- that He came that holy night in Bethlehem, and he pictures for us what a wonderful thing it must have been.

But there are four stanzas to Phillips Brooks' hymn. The remaining two stanzas talk about the coming of Jesus Christ - - today,....

"How silently, how silently,
The wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in."

Someone had to write a hymn like that, because the human heart cries out, not only for a Christ who came, not only for a Christ who will come again, in the far, far future.....but the human heart cries out for a Christ who continues to come - - who keeps knocking at the door of a man's heart, again, and ever so often.

The text for this sermon: the 7th and the 8th verses of the last chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."

There are some things so wonderful that they have to happen again.

There are some things so good that they just can't happen once and only once. It has to be repeated. That's the truth inherent in this sermon this morning. We Christians believe that Jesus Christ came. But suppose whatever we thought about Jesus Christ, we imprisoned Him in the past...and the only thought that you and I might have of Christ would be of Mary and Joseph and a little town called Bethlehem....an occasional sojourn into Galilee....and then a lonely cross upon a hill. And we would say that there are times when He made Himself known to those disciples and how they thoroughly enjoyed being in His presence ...and how they claimed Him as Lord and Master

....suppose that were the only story that I could tell you about Jesus Christ? - - the Christ who came...two thousand years ago....in a far-away land.

Or suppose I were to give emphasis to the other aspect of His coming - - and told you, as I will tell you next Sunday, how He will come again, but in the distant future...and how we say, in the words of the Creed "He comes again to judge both the quick and the dead" - - how He will return and establish here on earth His Kingdom

...but suppose that were the only thing that I would talk about, when I told you the story of Jesus Christ - -
- either the story of the Christ who came, two thousand years ago
- or the story of a Christ who, when He returns, will return in the remotely removed future....a long, long time from now.

I couldn't be happy with a God like that, a God who keeps Himself at far distant ends of the world - - either long, long ago...or far, far away - - in the remotely removed future. The human heart continues to cry out for a God

who does something today - - a God who is alive in the present moment - - a God who comes to me where I am, in my need - - today.

There are some people who believe in God without any difficulty, but the God in whom they believe is a God who acted a long time ago. They have no difficulty at all in reading the Scripture. They accept at face value the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a very easy thing to accept the God of somebody else. It's a very easy thing to accept the God who did perform wonderful things in history ...we read them in the Book, we read them in the precious Page, and we are fascinated.

I have mixed feelings, as some of you know, when I look at stained glass windows in a church. I treasure them, I cherish them for the aesthetic touch that they bring, but I am always troubled, lest when you and I look at them, we think of these characters, imprisoned in glass, and they become unreal--unrelated to our day, and we believe that what they symbolize is something that happened a long time ago. That's the way some people handle their God. They imprison Him in stained glass, or they imprison Him in the pages of a Book. Believe? - - yes - - but He's the God of the past.

That you might hear it correctly, I've brought the actual quotation here to the sacred desk, the words of D. H. Lawrence:

"Many people think that Christianity had great power, but the life is gone out of it. I know the greatness of Christianity. It is a past greatness. I know that but for those early Christians we should have never emerged from the chaos and the hopeless disaster of the Dark Ages. If I had lived in the year 400, pray God that I should have been a true and a passionate Christian. But now I

lives in 1924, and the Christian adventure is done."

...that's how no less a man than D. H. Lawrence felt about Jesus Christ---some-
one whose day is over. He came, He did what had to be done, and perhaps for
400 years He worked in people's lives; but, says D. H. Lawrence, perhaps speak-
ing your mind as well, it doesn't happen any more, He doesn't come to people's
lives - - He's the God of the past.....and maybe D. H. Lawrence might say,
He's the God of tomorrow.....but as far as today is concerned, where is He?

But I say to you again, I couldn't possibly worship a God who belongs to
the past, and the God who is great and good is yet to come. In company with
millions upon this earth I cry out for a God who can come to me now....

Jesus is coming!

Jesus is coming!and the marvel of marvels is this:

Now!

But you rise up and you say immediately, I cherish the thought, and I
need a God like that, but pray tell me, preacher, how does Jesus Christ come
Now? How can I believe that He's knocking at the door of my heart today?

Well let me answer the question as best I can.

I most sincerely believe that He comes again and over so often in the
present moment. I can give you His word for it. He comes to us, as you re-
member His own words "where two or three are gathered together, there am I"...
...Jesus said it. And if you want to be made aware of the presence of Christ,
find yourself in the company of those who wait for His appearance. That's the
kind of people Jesus was talking about when He used those words....if you want
to be made aware of His coming, put yourself in the company of those who long
for His appearance - - two of them, three of them - - four hundred of us right
now!

There's no mistaking the fact God can come to a man in his loneliness. But there are some times when it is made easier for us to be made aware of the presence of God. He most certainly comes to those who find themselves in the company of those who look for Him, who love Him, who delight in serving Him. That's why, with all the sorrow of my soul, as long as I live, I hope I will always have opportunity to make an impression upon the minds of those who are young, that once having committed themselves to Jesus Christ, they never permit themselves to be separated from His company....those young people who are part of our parish life right now--no matter what the future may bring, they might always find themselves seeking the company of the redeemed, knowing fellowship in the Family of God. For the human soul needs to be made aware of the immediacy of Christ...and where two or three are gathered together it is easier to find Christ, or the preferred statement is, to be found by Christ.

How can I know that Jesus is coming now?

How can I be made aware of His presence today?

He knew the hunger in human hearts. The last meal that He shared with the disciples band, He took the bread, and He took the cup..."Take, eat..."Take, drink"...."This is my Body.....This is my Blood"....."This is myself" ! We Lutherans cling tenaciously to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, for which we use the descriptive phrase His True Presence. Christ comes to us every time we receive the Sacrament.

Last Sunday evening it was my good fortune to entertain a question-and-answer period with one group of our teenagers. There we talked about the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion. One of them very boldly put this question, with all the honesty of his heart - -

"But suppose, Pastor, I don't come to take communion - - how

should I feel?"

I tried to answer. And I answered him as best I could, in this way:

"Your question is a good one. I cannot tell you how you will feel. I cannot answer you best from your point of view, just as you raise the question. I can only answer you from within my own heart. I can only tell you how I feel, should I deny myself the privilege of the Sacrament. I would know that I have kept Jesus Christ from my heart, in a way that He specifically has chosen to use....that if I did not come to receive the Sacrament of the Altar, I would be denying myself His Presence, His Presence in a way that He does not come at any other time, or in any other way. This is what I know, should I not come to Communion, for I remember that when He was here on earth, He said that we ought to do it. He gave us no alternative. He wants to come into my heart, and sometimes He wants to come in a very special way, and that special way is the Sacrament."

How does Jesus Christ come now?

Sometimes God comes into my heart in a very real way in the present moment - - when it's in the dark night of the soul, in my time of despair, in my utter loneliness, when the only light upon the horizon is the flickering star, yet it's there, and it's His gracious, gentle piercing into my darkness. So Christ comes to me - - - today.

He may also see fit to come to me in some new-found joy, in some good

fortune, in the gladness of the morning of my life. He may enable me to read the lines of love upon the face of a friend - - this I may call His most precious gift to me, as far as a human being is concerned. So Christ comes to me.

My friend, do not make the mistake of thinking that Christ belonged only to a people who lived two thousand years ago....

...do not make the mistake of believing that Christ is someone yet to come...

He is coming - - now.....each day.....each hour

....and with all my heart and soul I believe it,

that to someone, known only to yourself, He's

coming right now---this very moment!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

JESUS IS COMING: AGAIN?

- The Christ Who Will Come -

Today's sermon is the third in the series based upon the general Theme "Jesus Is Coming"; and the text is the same as that for the first sermon in the series, written in the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the 10th and the 11th verses:

"And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

When I was a lad I was greatly distressed to learn that there was a time when Christmas was not kept. I could hardly believe that this is true, for so Christmas had come to mean so much to me that I could never think of a day when people did not think of Christmas.

And you can imagine the shock that my soul experienced when I discovered that when the church was young they did not talk much about Christmas. And then to note that of the four Gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, only two of them make any record whatsoever of the birth of Christ, born in Bethlehem - - only two of the four Gospels talk about angels who sang, announcing the birth of Christ - - only in this incidental reference, so it would appear, do you have anything said at all in the Bible about shepherds and wise men....Mary....and Joseph....and the Christ who was manger-born.

And then as I began to read a little bit about church history, it was brought to my attention that it wasn't until perhaps the fifth or the sixth century that Christmas appeared in the calendar of the Church, and that the Church itself began to observe it as a festival.

It was too much for me to believe that there was a time when there wasn't a Christmas. Yet that was the early church for you. The early church did not cherish the thought alone that their Saviour had been born. They did not talk overmuch about the Christ of Bethlehem. But they seemed to talk incessantly about the Christ who was going to come again - - the Christ who was to return.

There was good reason why that was the basic philosophy.

When that little company of disciples had gone to the Mount of Ascensions and in this great moment Jesus returns to heaven, the angels of God say to the disciples.....

"Be on with it now! You just can't stand here,

either looking back or trying to freeze yourself in

this present moment.

Be on with it now!

And keep reminding yourself that He's coming again

- - - He's coming again!"

....and this was the basic truth by which the early church lived - -

Jesus is returning.....He will come back to us.

In fact, they took it so seriously, that you can read it for yourself in the pages of the New Testament, how they kept talking about it--the Christ who was going to come back again. And by the way, do you know the last verse in the Bible--just before the benediction is given? - - the last verse properly in the Book of the Revelation is:

"Even so, come Lord Jesus"

....so the church kept itself always with the forward look.

And they made so much of it that word got around that maybe a person shouldn't even get married....he ought not to stich himself even to a person in this world, because Jesus was coming, and then all things would be changed.

Some there were who sold all their property, got rid of their earthly possessions, so strong was their affection for things of heaven. And even the Apostle Paul, as you read some of his writings, expected Jesus Christ to return momentarily.

There's something to be said for their basic philosophy, for when a man even gives to God a backward look, he loses something. The Christ of Eternal Significance is not to be pin-pointed on a place on a map. The Christ of Eternal Significance is not to be found as you go back in a history book, and then when you come to it you say "Ah, this was it! ---when Tiberius was in charge, and when Herod was the King, and Cyreneus was the Governor of Syria." The Christ of Eternal Significance is not always to be yours just by remembering.

But you see, this is the fallacy that we unwittingly practice when we think of Christmas. Christmas for many of us is a time of remembering--looking back. I used to send out Christmas greetings to a circle of friends, and I would say as I would write "Christmas is a time of remembering, and I want you to know that this Christmas-tide I'm thinking particularly of your kindness to me".....and I was taking the backward look, thinking of something that had been done.

In the first parish that I served there was a man for whom I had unusually high regard, who said to me one time, "Why don't you go with me tonight, Pastor? There is always a measure of delight in my soul when Christmas comes because I go back to a certain home. I've been doing it now for any number of years. And I always go back to this home because in the early years of my life this man did something unusually kind for me, he went out of his way to give me some assistance when I needed it most, and I try never to forget,

especially at Christmas time - - I don't ever want to forget."

...it was a precious thing to spend a hour or so with that man, as he kept Christmas by remembering - - looking back.

And it's part of our thinking today, when in this very lovely Children's Creche Service at five o'clock, the boys and girls walk down the aisle, carrying the figures that belong to the Nativity scene, and as they do it, you see, we're asking them to look back, to remember what happened in Bethlehem, to talk about the people who lived two thousand years ago.

Please do not misunderstand me, there's much to be said for remembering, and Christmas must be thought of as a time when we remember God's love for us in Christ. But take a page from the book of the early Christians. They were not the people of the backward look, that is to say, that they looked only to the past. As they remembered, they also anticipated. They did not talk about the Christ who came at the expense of the Christ who would return. And who knows, maybe after it's all said and done, that for you and me, much of the joy at Christmas is not only the remembering, but anticipating. That's why we're fortunate when we belong to a church that observes such a simple thing as the Advent wreath, marking the Sundays toward the day that is yet to come, for Christmas, after it's all said and done, must be essentially anticipated.

Now what happens when you keep reminding yourself that Christ is yet to come, that is, He is to return, He will come again?

I'll tell you what happened to those who lived by this basic philosophy: fear went out of their hearts. When they kept talking about the Christ who was going to return, they honestly believed that no terrible thing could happen in this world, but what God would be able to overcome it when He came back in Christ. They couldn't conceive of anything, as far as this world was concerned, as being the last word. They believed that the last word would al-

ways be with God. So they talked a great deal about the Christ who was coming back, who would return.

And there was a measure of peace in their hearts when they kept talking about the Christ who was going to come back, because how, then, could they allow themselves to be unduly troubled? The world belonged to God and God was going to claim it. When they remembered that once upon a time God came in Christ, God so loved the world, giving Himself that our sins might be forgiven....and when they looked round about them, and they continued to see evidence of sin - - - they might be numbered in the ranks of the redeemed, but what about all these other sinners?--were they to be consigned to hell forever? would God simply walk away, now, and say "I did give them Christ--He did suffer and He did die, and I took Him back to Me in Heaven--this ends it as far as I'm concerned---I've done what I should have done".....these early Christians kept remembering that Jesus said "I will come back - - I will return" - - and that brought unspeakable joy to their hearts, because now they could honestly believe that the devil never could again possess the world, and God in Christ would not permit sin and rebellion to remain forever. This is what it did to them.

And let me tell you this, that every time the church soft-pedals the doctrine of the coming of Christ, every time the church fails to lay upon your heart the blessed thought of the second coming, we deny you something that your soul needs, because you and I are sustained by the precious thought that the world belongs to God, and Jesus Christ will not allow it to be lost. He will come again to possess it, and to redeem it forever and ever and ever.

When Lord Mountbatten was the Viceroy of India he was charged with the great responsibility to prepare the people for the transfer of power from the Crown to the Indian people themselves. Now they were to have their own Parlia-

ment, now they were to have their own President, now they were to have their own Prime Minister. It meant a great transfer of power. It was not to happen easily.

Not too long before this eventful day, back there in 1947, August 18, a photographer was doing a series of studies on this impending event. And he took a photograph of Lord Mountbatten's office. When the photograph was fully seen, attention was called to a calendar that was on his desk. On 4th August, 1947, he had written words to this effect: "Only 11 more days remain until the transfer of power...let's make certain we're ready."

You may not have a calendar on your desk on which you may write these words: "Time could be running out - - the Kingdom of this world is the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ - - He will return....we will have to transfer our power to Him....I will have to surrender to Him, my Lord and my Saviour"

....this may not be written on the calendar that you have on your desk, but would you believe me when I suggest that it ought to be written on the fabric of your heart?

....Christ is coming again to establish His Kingdom
forever....He is coming.

I got a Christmas present the other day, my first one this year. Like a teenager, or one younger than that, I couldn't wait until Christmas. I opened it the very day I got it, and I am fascinated by the gift. If you were to walk into my office here in Saint Luke Church right now you would find it on the desk. It's an hour glass. And as I turn this hour glass and see the grains of sand running rapidly I remind myself that time passes quickly.

And for the Christian, what is time but preparation - - to get ready - -

to make the most of each day, in readiness for the Christ to whom we belong.

There are many things in the liturgy of the Lutheran Church that strike a chord in my heart. One of them, the words that you heard earlier in this service.....

"The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you,
being penitent, pardon and remission of all
your sins,

time for amendment of life - - - "

....that means, to get ready.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS IS COMING - - WHY?"

Today's sermon is the last in the series based upon the general theme, "Jesus Is Coming," and the text is the 9th verse of the 5th chapter of the Epistle of James:

"Behold, the judge is standing at the door now."

A That's just about as immediate as you can get. It can't come any closer than that. That's exactly the way the early church felt concerning the coming of Jesus Christ---it was as close at hand as the present moment. They did not think about the second coming of Christ in terms of a thousand years, more or less. They thought about the second coming of Jesus Christ in the immediate present.

B They were mistaken, of course. The world did not come to an end; and we who are part of the world right now know that the world is still with us. However, the early church lived constantly in the blessed assurance that Christ who came at Bethlehem would return. The church has never lost sight of this - - - He is coming....He is coming again. And whether you would recognize it or not, this is the whole theme of the Advent season - -

CHe is coming.....He is coming.

It isn't just that Christmas, December 25, is coming. But the primary note that must receive its rightful emphasis is that Advent is a kind of preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. Christmas simply points up the wonderful truth that He who once came will come again.

Now, concerning this second coming people have asked all kinds of questions. We were made to ask questions, but unfortunately sometimes we spend too much time asking the wrong questions. Such a question as this: When will He come? is not

too important. Such a question as this: How will He come? may not be too important. In fact, there are those who very foolishly have tried to answer the first question "When will He come again?" - - they've even endeavored to do what Christ himself could not do, they set the exact day and the exact hour. This is not only stupidity, it is folly. And because it's been as ridiculous as that, there have been some people who have lost interest in the second coming of Jesus Christ because they have laughed at Christians who have set the exact day and the exact hour. It's not only a stupid thing to do, it's not only a foolish thing to do...it's a blasphemous thing to do, for Christ himself said "Not even the Son of Man knows the hour nor the day."

Let me discourage you as best I can, then.....

- - do not concern yourself overmuch as to when, trying to pinpoint the time or the day...

- - or even to concern yourself overmuch as to just how - -

"in trails of glory - - " or what have you....

.....but for the moment at least, let me suggest as primary consideration WHY He comes again. In what role will He appear?

Would I shock you if I were to tell you that He does not come again only in the role of the Saviour? He who comes in the role of the Saviour is already here! God is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.."God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" - - He's already given Him - - - the Saviour has come! - - - He is here already!

But when the Saviour returns, He returns as you and I say every Sunday when we come to worship---"He will come again to judge - - "

.....and with all the order of my soul I beg you to take this seriously---to understand that the Christ who returns comes in the role of a judge....

....God has already given us His love

....God has already given us the truth of His Gospel

....God has already given us life eternal in His Son

....now the Saviour returns, to see what you and I have done with this - - to ascertain, to evaluate, our response.

A He came. And when He returns He will judge us on what we have done and what we are doing with what He has already made known. This is an awesome thing.

B Now when He appears we will either be ready or we will not be ready. It's as terrible and it's as wonderful as all that! In the moment of His appearing there's no time to get ready. Now the preparation must be in progress....now I must be responding to His love!....today I must be walking by His truth!..right now I must be sharing His love!

C Now it might be helpful for the moment to try to consider on what ground He will judge us. It goes without saying, doesn't it, that He will judge us according to our response to His love. Perhaps the worst thing that man is capable of is being incapable of responding to love. This was the great difficulty of the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees - - - here was God in Christ loving them...here was God in Christ on Calvary's hill, allowing Himself to be sacrificed - - - and they seemed incapable to read the lines--to hear the voice, and to see that this was happening. God has already done everything essential for our salvation. The act of redemption is already completed. God in Christ came into the world, He suffered, He died, He paid the supreme sacrifice, He arose from the dead - - the work of redemption is completed. Now Christ comes again to judge us by our response to His love.

Christ comes as judge, to see what we have done with this truth that's

A been offered, the Good News that's already ours. It comes to us that we might share it with other people. The only way that some people will ever know that Christ already came is whether or not you and I tell them. Two weeks from today, God willing, I shall be in the Holy Land, completing the first leg on the mission to India. I should like very, very much if once more I could go back to the Shepherd's Cave, if I could visit that place under Judean stars where the Saviour was born. But I am willing to believe that should that materialize, He will be no more real to me than He is right now. There are many people who will never get to Bethlehem. There are many people who will only know that there has been a Bethlehem because of the Bethlehem they found in the hill country of your heart. So God, when He comes as judge in Christ, will ask us what we've done with this Good News - - how we've spread the word - - how many people there are who know it because of us.

B
C I read something the other day that shook me to the very depth of my soul. It was the account of a man's dream; and the dreamer was none other than Martin Niemöller, that ever-vigilant soul for Jesus Christ who spent eight and one-half years as a personal prisoner of Adolph Hitler in the concentration camp. Martin Niemöller says, "I had a dream. I had a dream of the Day of Judgment. And standing there at the bar of Judgment was Adolph Hitler; and God was taking him to task....and Adolph Hitler was pleading innocence--innocence by virtue of the fact, he said, that no one ever told him the Gospel." And then," Martin Niemöller said, "as the angel was confronting Adolph Hitler and Adolph Hitler gave the reply 'but no one ever told me the Gospel' - - - the angel came to me and I became part of my dream. The angel said 'Martin Niemöller, there was a time when you spent a solid hour with Adolph Hitler - - could you have been an hour with Adolph Hitler, and now for him to say that he had never heard of the Gospel?'"

When Jesus Christ comes again to judge me, this will be part of the picture - -

- - what have I done with the Gospel by which I am saved?

A But it's one thing to see my soul and my soul alone before God, but quickly I must say to you, I'm not so sure that a man can ever see his soul alone in the presence of God. Well, when Christ comes to judge you and me, He judges us upon the relationship that we've had with all the other people with whom we have associated - - no man ever stands alone in the presence of God. For you and I bring with us all the other people with whom we've had any kind of association, and God in Christ will judge us on the basis of the love which He has offered us, and then He'll judge us on the basis of the need in the lives of other people that we have met, or failed to meet. His judging could be as demanding, as exhausting as all that!

b Jean Paul Sartre, the French writer, is not right when he says that hell is other people....and when he said that he meant "Hell is for me the irritating, the annoying demands of other people upon my life - - let me have my peace, let me have my prosperity, let me have my security - - but then there are always these other people who disturb me, who annoy me, who irritate me - - and they make a hell of it for me!"

che is not right, I tell you, - - because once there was a carpenter's son, God's Great Galilean, who led us to believe that heaven lies in all these other people, for they are God's children, and they were not meant for hell, they were meant for heaven. They have only to be ministered to in Christ, that their souls should be saved. For heaven also belongs, not only to me, but to them as well.....and when He comes again, He'll come as judge, and He'll judge me on this basis - - my relationship with other people.

Let me read for you something that I read a long time ago when I first became your Pastor. It was in one of those sermons back in the spring of 1956. It's Studdart Kennedy's "The Sorrows of God" - the poem of a Cockney soldier's

dream after church.....

....he pictures God coming, now, to judge him. And as he stands there before, God, God parades in front of the Cockney soldier all the other people with whom he has had some kind of association in his life.....

"I seemed to stand alone beside a solemn kind of sea;
Its waves, they got in my inside and touched my memory;
And day by day, and year by year, my life came back to me - - "

....a parade of faces, a parade of people. And then one of them stops in front of him - - she has the eyes of a London prostitute...and God takes him to task, because God says - - "Her soul was Mine" - -

"All eyes were in His eyes, all eyes, my wife's and a million more;
They were sad - - my God, how sad with tears that seemed to shine,
And quivering bright with the speech of light,
They said, 'Her soul was Mine.'
And then at last He said one word, He said just one word---'Well?'
And then I said in a funny voice, 'Please, Sir, can I go to hell?'
And He stood there and He looked at me,
And He kind of seemed to grow, till He shone like the sun above my head;
And then He answered, 'No--you can't; that hell is for the blind,
And not for those who see.
You know that you've earned it, lad, so you must follow Me.
Follow Me on by the paths of pain, seeking what you have seen,
Until at last you can build the is
With the bricks of the night have been.'

That's what He said, as I'm alive, and that there dream was true.
But what He meant, I don't quite know, though I know what I have to do.
I've got to follow what I've seen till this old carcass dies,
For I daren't face, in the Land of Grace, the sorrows of those eyes.
There ain't no throne, there ain't no books - -
It's Him you've got to see;
It's Him, just Him, that's the judge of blokes like you and me;
And, boys, I'd sooner frizzle up in the flames of burning hell,
Than stand and look into His face,
And hear His voice say - - 'Well?'

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GIFTS FOR THE KING"

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

A When I was a lad I used to say 'no' to the preacher while he was preaching. He never heard me, of course, but that child's mind of mine could never quite agree with him at one point in particular. He had a way of saying, when he handed out the offering plates - - "It is more blessed to give than to receive."It never quite made sense to me.

b For as I was a child and neared the Christmas season, the joy of Christmas was always in getting. The presents under the tree that meant most to me were not the ones that I had put there; they were the presents that had my name on them. As long as I was a child this thought always lingered with me, and that's why, every now and then when my home town preacher would say "It's more blessed to give than to receive," I kept saying, 'No, I don't believe it.'

c Now the years have passed, and I frankly confess that perhaps the first sign of spiritual maturation may be the willingness to believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Tell me honestly now, which is your greater joy this Christmas of 1963 - - the gifts that you've already wrapped, the names of other people that you've already put on the tags....or will your joy be greater, much greater, when you pick out the present, and, lo and behold! it has your name on it? Tell me now, which for you is the greater joy? A sure sign of spiritual maturation could well be when a man is willing to ascribe to the truth which is scriptural, echoing the words of Jesus Christ himself: It is more blessed to give than to get.

A That's why you can't overlook in the Christmas story that there were wise men who came from the East...and when they came, they had to give, they had to respond to what they saw. We call them wise men for more reasons than one. They were wise men because they were looking for an answer in this world, an answer that was out of this world. They needed a wisdom far greater than their own; and they were wise men because when they found what they were looking for, they had to respond with something that they could give, and that something had to be from their best. And so you and I are constrained to recognize the blessed truth that it was out of their treasure that they presented unto Him gifts.

But wait, you say, what can anyone give to God?

b Properly and rightly we say God has everything. What can you give to someone who has everything? One hesitates to say it in the same breath, but sometimes that's your problem, isn't it? You're fortunate to have that kind of a friend - - the hardest person in the world for whom to shop. For in this land of prosperity, in this land of good fortune, there are people who seemingly have everything.

c The wise men came into the presence of a king, and they brought gifts fit for a king, and gifts fit for a king have to come from a man's treasure....and for them the treasure was something of gold, something of frankincense, something of myrrh.

We would walk in the footsteps of the wise men, we who would follow the star, so I ask you - - what will you bring to the Christ? what will you offer God? We must begin where the wise men began - - they looked into their treasure. What, pray tell, are your treasures? What are the priceless things that you possess?

May I name three?

How about that voice of yours? A voice can be a priceless thing...to be able to speak....to become articulate, to take your dreams and to syllabize them, form them into words....to allow someone to know, as you witness, what lies down deep inside your heart. I would be lost if I could not speak...

...out of the treasure of my heart you and I must offer Him these voices of ours. It was a wise Scotswoman who said to her son when he left home, going away to study to become a preacher, and she said to him - - "Ma son, me lad, wherever you go, whatever you do, always speak a good word for Jesus Christ." She could have said the same thing to her son had he gone away to become a teacher, a craftsman, an engineer, a technician, a scientist....
..."Always speak a good word for Jesus Christ." Your voice is a treasure. Use it wisely and well to glorify Him.

Wilfred Grenfell sometimes is referred to as one of the great apostles of our day. Do you know how he happened to become a Christian? One night he happened to attend a religious service in a mission---not many people present. And after he was in for a little while a handful of drunken sailors came---all save one---and they were making light and making fun of one of their number, but they stayed the meeting through, not always attentive, far from being sanctimonious. In the course of the evening the man in charge of the meeting invited testimonies....and the sober sailor stood up, and in a rather awkward fashion told them what Jesus Christ had come to mean to him. Wilfred Grenfell writes, "As I sat there I could feel the contempt, I could feel the scorn, I could feel the ridicule of all of the rest of the sailors, and

how, when the meeting was over, they'd laugh at him, and they'd make him pay a terrible price for his standing up and saying a good word for Jesus Christ." Says Wilfred Grenfell, "I was so impressed with the man's testimony that before I knew it I stood alongside of that lonely sailor and I said, 'I want to thank you, sir, for what you've said about Jesus Christ - - just the way you've said it makes me want to claim Him for my Saviour, too.'" So Wilfred Grenfell came to Jesus Christ.

...but suppose that lonely sailor in his awkward fashion had not used his voice to glorify Jesus Christ - - how might Wilfred Grenfell ever have known?

A voice is an exceedingly precious thing. I count it a treasure. I would be lost without it.....and wouldn't you? Out of my treasure I offer Him my voice, that I, too, might speak a good word for Jesus Christ.

Out of my treasure I bring to Jesus Christ my hands. I would be lost without them. I am not an artisan, I am not a craftsman...but even in the preaching of a sermon, the shaking of a fist, the pointing of a finger, the beckoning 'come to Jesus Christ' may be just the needful act. Hands are precious....with the broken finger, a sore thumb--just try buttoning your collar sometime. To be denied the use of your hand, your wrist, your finger - - they are priceless - - they are treasures.

By the use of our hands men live. Let them be the treasure that you bring to Jesus Christ - - the gift of a day's work, honestly done and well.

My life. This is priceless.

God does not deal in duplicates. There is none other just like you, so

rare a thing are you! Let this be the treasure that you bring to Jesus Christ.
Let your life be lived for Him.

What can you bring to Jesus Christ, who has everything? Ah, let me tell you this - - listen carefully, you may not believe it at first - - but in this present world Jesus Christ has nothing, except what you and I bring to Him. The heavens belong to Him, but He craves the earth, your world and mine; and all that He'll ever get out of this world is what you and I bring and offer to Him.....

"He has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no voice but our voice
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To lead them to His side."

...."What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him - -
Give my heart."

It's something He doesn't have, you see, until I bring it to Him.

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Prayer

What have we, O God, that we have not received?
Thou hast given us life, priceless treasure.
Thou hast given us eternal life;
Thou hast given us, O God, life by which we can labor,
a day's work done well.
Thou hast given us life, O God, by which we can love;
in our relationship, one with another, to reflect
something of that love in Christ which claims us.
Therefore, let us live, and let us love, to the honor and
glory of Thy Holy Name.
Our Father.....

When you leave today will you please look for the usher at the door who ought to hand to you a copy of this pamphlet entitled "India" which is one in the Interpretation Series being prepared by the Board of World Missions. It's one of the finest things of its kind that I have seen and will give you necessary background information for the trip that engages your Pastor's time and his talent the next two months.

Now let me talk to you very briefly about this mission.

Whenever you come to church you are in duty bound to lift your eyes beyond your own horizon. The Kingdom of God is never to be confined to one people at one place. The Kingdom of God is something more than Saint Luke Congregation and Saint Luke Church. This, of course, we express in many ways, the very truth of that statement. Every Sunday morning in the Prayer of the Church we ask God's blessing upon the total impact of the Kingdom in all parts of the world. We ask His blessing upon the missionaries, evangelists, teachers, who take the name of Jesus Christ and His cause at home, and abroad.

Every Sunday when you come to church and you put your offering upon the plate, it's taken to the altar, it's dedicated, and a generous portion of that offering goes immediately to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all parts of the world.

Every now and then a member of this congregation is asked to serve on a Board of the Church, or a committee - - to serve as a director, to become actively engaged in the leadership role through the Maryland Synod or the Lutheran Church in America. These are the opportunities that come to us, that we might be mindful of the fact that we are part of the total Kingdom.

Now, very recently, we have been told that there is a serious problem in our work in south India. If you read the issue of the LUTHERAN some six months ago you'd have been told the nature of the problem and the difficulty.

We Lutherans here in America have been doing work in India for over a hundred years. Now, as is typical of the cry that's going up from all parts of the earth, the indigenous folk want things to themselves, and rightly so. But it's always better when one is prepared to assume obligation and responsibility. The indigenous Church in south India, as far as we Lutherans are concerned, has come upon a difficult time, and the problem, of all things, is a problem of spiritual qualification in its leadership.

We have five synods in south India. In one of those synods right now we have two sets of officers. Envy, jealousy and strife exist. And it's all quite understandable. For the impact that we've been able to make in the name of Jesus Christ in India has been made very largely upon those who have been the outcasts. Now, when an outcast becomes a Christian for the first time in his life he becomes somebody, and when I say that, I mean it becomes an open door to power - - he can become an office-holder, he can become a deacon, he can choose certain works, he can disburse financial items.

Human sin is human sin the world over. Now in the young church it's a gross sin. They recognize their problem. They have tried to resolve it. And, interestingly enough, they have looked to us, their brethren in the faith in America, and they've asked for help - - help to be expressed in a rather unusual fashion - -

"Send us no blueprints.....send us no programs

....send us no money! But just send us two pastors - -

two pastors who will come and live with us, preach, teach, and share something of the love of God."

....that's the nature of the request.

And now specifically, as far as Saint Luke Church is concerned, it's your Pastor who has been asked to serve as a member of a two-man team. And so today, from Dulles at 5:30, we will emplane, we spend six weeks in India. It will be, and I say it in an unabashed fashion, the most difficult of all the assignments that I've ever undertaken. And would you believe me, and would you understand if I were to say, it's only my love for my Lord that has made me say yes to the call.

We shall go sustained by your prayers. We shall get up early in the morning, as those of you who have been in India well know--the native begins his day early, and for the devout Christian, it's always with prayer, and many mornings we'll be conducting church services at five o'clock in the morning and we may continue until the late hours of the evening.

Dr. Oscar W. Carlson is my colleague. You ought to know who he is. He is the Pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Baltimore, right at the edge of Towson. He has been there for nineteen years. Prior to his becoming the pastor of that congregation he was the first Director of Evangelism for the United Lutheran Church in America. He is a devout soul, an able preacher, a good churchman, and a Biblical scholar. I ask that you lift us up in the arms of your prayers.

Now upon the completion of the work in India, Dr. Carlson will hop, skip and jump, girdling the globe, visiting in Malaysia briefly, where a son of their congregation is a missionary.

At the completion of our work in India, I shall go to Nepal, where I shall spend four days visiting two members of Saint Luke Church. They are teenagers, their father is with the AID program there, and last summer they were confirmed in the Christian Faith in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, these two young men.

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And then from Nepal to Saigon, where I shall spend three days with the Edger C. Sovik family, members of this congregation; and then on to Hong Kong where my assignment will be to conduct a mission, or a retreat, for the missionaries and the workers in Hong Kong; and then on for two days in Tokyo, to be spent with members of Saint Luke Church, Col. Sanders and Mrs. Sanders, Bruce Mabey and his wife, the Yamadas; and of course, crowded as the schedule will be, there must be time to visit Dr. Kishi and to learn first-hand of the work of the Lutheran Church in Japan and of our Theological Seminary there. Of more than ordinary interest to you should be the stay in Hong Kong, because we are supporting, even in a small way, the mission work in Hong Kong as part of our benevolence program. If I could not have the assurance of your prayers I would not go.

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Last evening we spent about two hours, Church Councilmen, heads of committees, and staff members, going over the structured work for the next two months. Every phase of the total program of Saint Luke Church will be continued. Sundays when you come you'll find in the chancel the Rev. Donald R. Piper, either conducting the service or preaching. There will be three Sundays when he will not be in the pulpit, and on those occasions you will be receiving as your guest preacher the President of the Maryland Synod, Dr. J. Frank Fife, who comes on the first Sunday in February; the last Sunday in January it will be the Rev. J. Frederick Neudecker, Secretary at the India desk at the Board of World Missions. It seemed well that he should come and pay his first visit to Saint Luke Church and have this relationship between the Board of World Missions, his desk, and the assignment that your Pastor will be currently undertaking. And then another Sunday the sermon will be preached by the Rev. Professor Harry E. Yeide, lately received into this parish family.

Sister Josephine, in my absence, will direct the pastoral ministry. Every need for a pastoral ministry will be met. Do not hesitate to get in touch with her. And I am delighted to tell you that my colleagues in the Washington District have assured me that any emergency that ought to be met, they gladly and willingly will come forward to help.

The only phase of our program that will not be conducted as usual will be the regular New Member Group sessions that are conducted on Monday nights. They will be omitted for the simple reason that this is the only way by which I can get to know you, the prospective member, in a better way. And so the next New Member Group will be formed in April. But otherwise, everything in every way goes on, exactly as it ought to be.

May God be with you....may God be with me.

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